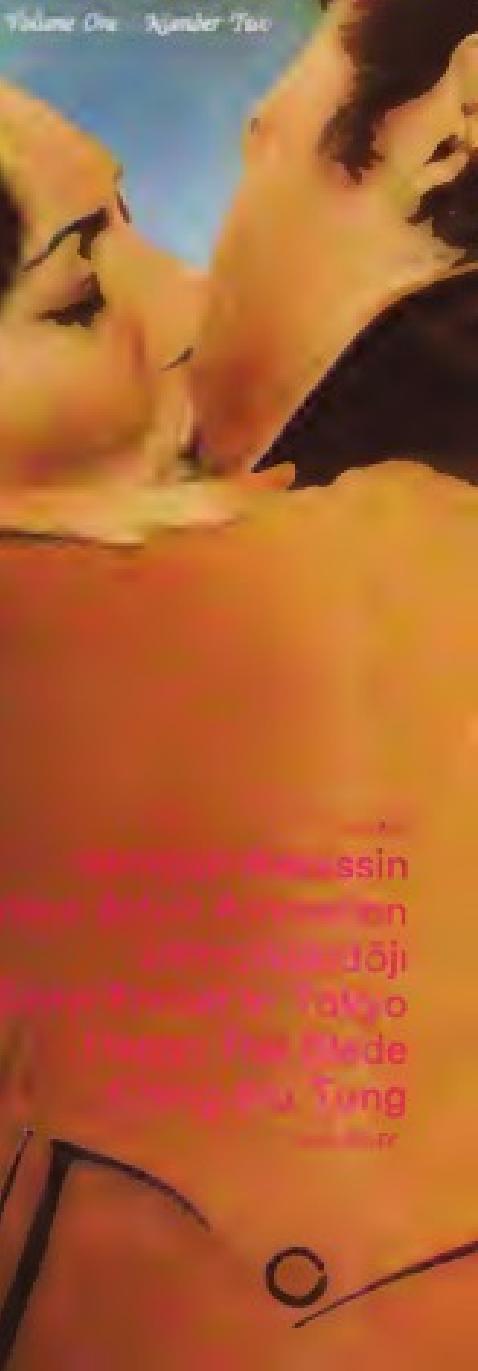


Asian Trash Cinema

Volume One Number Two



Shojo Kiss
Japanese American
Kamikaze Dōjū
Love Triangle Tokyo
Korean Blue Steele
A Long Day Tung
...and more

\$5.00

ATC takes a detailed look at *Siegan Aswad* (Page 20)
and *Masao The Blade* (Page 21)



Asian Trash Cinema

Co-Editors: Craig Ledbetter and Tom Weisser ★ Design/Artwork: Francine Dali

Editorial

from CRAIG LEDBETTER

With this second issue of ATC, the magazine begins to take the shape I had anticipated. Let's face it, had Tom continued to crank out 400 reviews per issue, he would have to be committed to an insane asylum before the publication of a third issue.

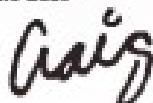
This issue has a decidedly Japanese flavor as coverage of two satirical series, Jap animation, and one decidedly bizarre sex film dominates. The Japanese have made (and with horror films like *EVIL DEAD TRAP*, continue to make) films that truly are disturbing. Hopping Hong Kong vampires just don't terrify me with their slapstick ways. There is (and will continue to be) coverage of the Hong Kong film industry within the pages of ATC, so don't despair. Witness the interview this issue with Ching Siu Tung. Let me know if my focus on Japanese trash should continue or should I concentrate more on the Chinese films.

There are never enough magazines covering the world of Asian genre cinema, but here are details on three of the best:

MARTIAL ARTS MOVIE ASSOCIATES #24-\$12 for 4 issues, Bill Connolly, 6638 DeLongpre #4, Hollywood, CA 90028, 20 pages. The babychild of Ric Meyers and Bill Connolly, MAMA features coverage slanted toward Kung-fu films. However, they don't ignore the current trends in HK action films either. A lively letters column is also a plus.

ORIENTAL CINEMA #13- \$8.00 per issue, Damon Foster, P.O.Box 576, Fremont, CA 94537-0576, 48 pages. A one man tour de force that is truly a labor of love. Damon's acidic personality fills every page and you'll either love it or hate it. The color collage cover and inside magazine insert takeoff on Pangoria indicate a talent rather rare these days. I HIGHLY RECOMMEND YOU TRY AT LEAST ONE ISSUE!

SKAM #9/10-\$7.00 for 3 issues, Richard Aldyama, P.O.Box 240228, Honolulu, HI 96824-0228, 40 pages. The current issue is a special Girls and Guns 'zine. With over 40 detailed and well written reviews, SKAM is one of the day's postal highlights whenever a new issue arrives. It's also filled with dozens of pictures of Hong Kong actors and actresses which really helps those new to the world of ATC. One of the best.





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LETTERS

Dear Mr. Weisser and ATC --

The purpose of this letter is to express my sincere regret for any ill feelings and 'appearance of defamation' that I may have inadvertently caused because of an article I wrote for the fanzine *Monster*. The said article was never intended to be a personal attack on your integrity or personality...the whole piece was meant to tease joint editor and publisher of *Monster* and *Naked! Screaming! Terror!*, whom I suppose is Tim Paxton.

Likewise, the pioneering CavenAsian Special issue of *NET!* is to be commended for the groundbreaking role it played in eliciting interest in an area previously ignored by B-movie fans in this hemisphere. Allow me at this point to elaborate on the problems I have with your 'The Dead And The Deadly' piece, which was expanded and much improved for *Asian Trash Cinema* but still carries some shortcomings. Certainly, factual errors concerning titles and directions are unavoidable and will eventually be smoothed out, given more time and research. My main objection, however, is the fact that you don't distinguish the movies you have actually seen from those you haven't, yet you give them all a qualitative 'stars' rating as if you've seen them all. Of course, this is the same criticism I level to Phil Hardy's *Encyclopedia Of Horror* where qualitative opinions are advanced even for movies Mr. Hardy and his staff couldn't, in all probability, have seen.

I understand 'The Dead And the Deadly' was a labor of love and it is to your credit that it came out so well as a handy guide to generally obscure material (where else would I read about stuff like *Impetus Fire?*). But, for instance, your article... merges phrases carelessly claiming that the villain [of *Encounters Of The Spooky Kind*]...invokes the Monkey King and other spirits to eliminate the hero.' What really happens is that the mythological character of the Monkey King is incarnated in the hero to fight the bad guy! Of

course you might argue I'm quibbling over a minor detail -- and you're right -- but if you choose to write a two-sentence plot summary, better those two sentences be accurate...

For all this nitpicking and error-pointing, I emphatically do not claim perfection, superiority or infallibility...It is quite possible you and I are approaching the field of genre movie appreciation from entirely different standpoints. You said that the only reason you are writing about [Asian cinema] is because of your love for these movies, rather than from a more scholarly reason. If you allow me to say so, it shows: your articles for *Asian Trash Cinema* and *European Trash Cinema* are more personal reminiscences and gut reactions rather than contextual appreciation. Because of my background and early influences, I take a more structured, historic and analytical stance. You may think I'm pretentious...pompous... but this is the way I see movies, possibly to my own infinite regret, of not being able to enjoy them pure-and-simple any more...In this condition, I don't feel sufficiently qualified to, with very few exceptional cases, comment adequately on Chinese popular cinema...It would require me more time than I can afford to properly study and analyze Hong Kong popular films; all I can do at this point is watch them under the most rudimentary rules of perception... - Horacio Higuchi

Jeeeeeze. Lighten up, Horacio. When you go to the movies with friends, do you give a pop-quiz afterwards?

I write about Asian films because I really do love them. And I don't deny nor apologize for my 'gut reaction' reviews. My basic approach to criticism is 'how much fun is this movie?' I can't imagine any kind of a life-style that turns watching movies into tomatoe shuddery. It's really a damn shame when somebody can't enjoy a film on the 'pure-and-simple' level anymore. Note to Craig: if I ever get to that point, kill me.

-Tom

DIRECT ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO: CRAIG LEDBETTER, PO BOX 5367, KINGWOOD, TX 77352

Dear ATC,

Enjoyed Asian Trash Cinema #1, but I noticed a few errors.

In his review of the *In The Line Of Duty* films, Tom didn't mention that Michele Khan and Cynthia Khan are two different actresses. Michele starred in the first two installments, but quit the series after marrying Dickson Poon, owner of D&B Films. D&B replaced her with Cynthia, a Taiwanese ballet dancer with similar facial features.

Aces Go Places 4 was directed by Ringo Lam, not Cheung Kuan. *Assault Of The Joyful Goddess* and *Nine Demons* are directed by Chang Chen, one of the top directors at the Shaw Brothers studio during the 60s and 70s. Lau Kar (*Tiger On The Seat*, *Aces Go Places 3*) and Sun Chung (*City War*) are also noted Shaw veterans. *Beach Of The War Gods* was made in 1971, not 1990. Ti Lung is misidentified as Danny Lee on page 33. *God Of Gamblers* was directed by Wong Ching, not Sun Chung. Amy Yip did not play the policewoman who became a robot in *Robotrix*; she played one of the original androids.

Painted Faces is about the childhood struggles of Jackie Chan, Samo Hung, and Yuan Shao. This was overlooked in the review. The plot was far from non-existent in *Police Story 2*. It was about a gang of mad bombers threatening to blow up Hong Kong.

Golden Queen Commands, *Pink Force Commands*, *Brook Of Heroes*, *Island Warriors*, *Phoenix: The Raider* and *Island On Fire* were all directed by Che Yen Ping (this is curious, but appreciated; information: the Sims credit bogus director ranging from Lawrence Full to Ulysses An-Yeung, Ed.)

I strongly disagree with the review of *God Of Gamblers 2*. It is a very funny comedy and a perfect vehicle for Chien Sing Chi. Unlike most HK comedians, Chi is actually funny. I saw *God Of Gamblers 2* with a Chinese audience at the Great Star Theatre in San Francisco, and the crowd reaction was very positive. Then again, his humor was not intended for white guys like us. I also felt that *Dragon From Russia* was far more enjoyable than *Killer's Romance* and a far superior version of "Crying Freeman." *Dragon From Russia* is actually a salute to Hong Kong's kungfu genre...*Killer's Romance* is just another gun movie.

Evelyne Kraft also starred in *Deadly Angels*, a 1978 Shaw Brothers actioner that influenced the recent "Angel" series and subsequent rip-offs. After

seeing that photo on the back cover of *ATC #1*, I am now determined to get a copy of *Collation!* Looking forward to the next issue.

Sincerely,
* John Grace

Thanks for the valuable information. I still prefer *Killer's Romance* to *Dragon From Russia*, probably because of Simon Yam's performance. Plus I really don't enjoy *Kung Fu* action; I'd take 'another gun movie' any day.

And I contend that the plot to *Police Story 2* merely serves as a backdrop to the wild stunts and action sequences. But that's okay. -Tom

Tom and Craig (ATC):

I know you warned me about *Impens Fire*. In fact you specifically said: "Not everyone will be amused nor entertained by this controversial Filipino/Chinese production." Now, after viewing it, I'm not sure how I really feel. Except, yes, I have been truly shocked by it. There certainly are different standards...between Asian and Western cultures. This film is a perfect example of that. Besides the taboo sexual content, the ending came as a total surprise...

* Jerome Richards

Craig:

I received and read *Asian Trash Cinema* (thank you!). Your printer certainly did a bang-up job with the color covers! Reversing pice like those of exotic Li Ching-Hua and pulchritudinous (I've been dying to use that word!) Evelyne Kraft promise to make each new edition something worth waiting for!

I do have a minor bone to pick with Mr. Weisser, however, regarding his (for the lack of a better word) narrow-minded assertion that *Kung Fu* films are (and I quote) "far to boring for mindless cinema escapism." Huh? I hate to burst his bubble but there is a multitude of wonderful titles out there that smash his stereotype into tiny pieces. I defy Tom to watch something like Chang Cheh's *Five Deadly Venoms* (a lively period actioner that is loaded with eye-popping fight sequences, esoteric weapons, and horror setpieces) and tell me he left even the least bit sleepy afterwards!

I guess I didn't really mean the "narrow minded" crack because I respect Tom's rak-taking and ground-breaking writings far too much to really believe that but I'm entitled to my opinions too, and he really got my hackles up about an area of the genre that is near and dear to my heart.

Having gotten that off my chest, kudos to Tom for bringing us such a comprehensive overview of the Hong Kong scene with his seminal piece "The Dead And The Deadly". We horror and exploitation fans need all the help we can get tapping this relatively new vein of gold, and now can take it all in at a glance! Tom's critical capsules also save us the pain of plunking down \$20-\$30 a pop for some of these things that later turn out to be losers. I know I'll be keeping my copy in the old film library for many years to come. For what it's worth, here's my two cents' worth regarding all those mini-reviews:

The Blackmagic With Butchery. A bizarre twist on the old "Monkey's Paw" shick in which you guys neglected to mention that the director, the amazing Lo Lieh, himself actually appears in the film (as the wacky wizard who gets his trousers caught in the door of a moving car).

A Bullet In The Head. I was lucky enough to see this epic in a theatre and was utterly blown away by the jaw-dropping shootout that erupted in a bar room. I too stood up and took notice of the white-suited Simon Yam's riveting performance, so you hit the nail right on that one!

Police Story 1 (on tape as Jackie Chan's Police Force). Sorry, but I happen to think that Jackie Chan's mugging and goofiness is one of his most endearing qualities. Hong Kong is full of stunt men, but how many of them can make you laugh? The humor gives Jackie an edge on his competition (and, hell, let's face it, much of his identity). (I agree, kinda. But when his mugging gets in the way of the story, that's too much. Ed.)

RoboForce. I sought out this film (aka *I Love Mania*) after reading Tom's original review in *Maledi Screaming!* Terror! He was right on the money! I found this one (with Teul Hark in an acting capacity, here essaying the character of "Whisky") to be the fastest 90-or-so minutes of fun I've sampled from Hong Kong to date. A delightful way to spend a Saturday afternoon (which is the way I did it).

Wolf Devil Woman. An astonishing film, to be sure. Seeing as Tom is obviously a big Pearl Cheong fan (so am I), I thought I would mention that she is also in *Inheritor Of King Pu* (reviewed under the Hong Kong title: *The Heroic One*, Ed.), *Matching Escort* (aka *Wolf Devil Woman 2* and *Venus Wolf Ninja*), *General Invincible* (HK title: *Invincible*), and *Miraculous Flower* (*Phoenix: Wolf Ninja*). For those of us who can't get enough of her. (Don't forget *Dark Lady Of The Butterfly*, too. Ed.)

Human Skin Lanterns. It might be worth clarifying that nutty Lo Lieh (kidnapping young girls and murdering bodyguards in his skull mask and bright wig) doesn't merely KILL his victims and then skin them, rather he actually leaves them ALIVE (!) making an already horrific viewing experience even more harrowing!

Assault Of The Joyful Goddess. You've listed this one as a 1983 production by Lin King Ku. Are you sure you didn't mean *Attack Of The Joyful Goddess* by Chang Chah instead? (This one is an oddity, indeed; it appears to be a case of the same movie being peddled under bogus credits to the International marketplace. The title should, in fact, read *Attack Of The Joyful Goddess* by Chang Chah, or Zhang Che for the purists. Ed.)

Seventh Curse. Aside from all the unbelievable monsters and grues, the most unique element of this film (for me anyway) was seeing modern military ordinance (hand-held rocket launchers, etc) being employed against the demon at the finale.

→ Bob Sargent / Videocase

Editor(s):

What a great magazine! I love the reviews. Thanks to Tom Weissler for the extensive work. My only complaint: why didn't you write about the Mr. Vampire series? Instead of merely listing the sequels, you should have reviewed them individually.

Best Wishes,

→ Tony Sebastian

Dear Craig and Tom,

Right away, you guys held my attention with the terrific color front and back cover. The incredibly sexy pic of the incredibly beautiful Evelyn Kraft was enough for me. That face. That body. Those lips. Let me calm down for a second.

Okay. Then I look inside and see a still of a lascivious actress by the name of Li Ching Hua. Not bad. After splashing cold water on my face and scrutinizing the photo of Evelyn Kraft for another half-hour (and more cold water), I began to digest the reviews.

All of Tom's reviews were very entertaining and made me want to see a lot of the movies mentioned. I've seen no law of these films; *Collation* and *Cloudy Vision* are fun movies. I enjoyed *Collation* ten times more than the awful 1978 remake of *King Kong*.

Anyway, I hope to see more of these films. ATC #1 was great and I look forward to more issues.

Only one request: include a color still of Evelyn Kraft in every issue.

Take care,

Conrad Widener

Wow!...But honestly, Conrad, what do you really think of Evelyn Kraft?

-Tom

Dear Tom and Craig:

Asia Trash Cinema #1 is an absolute breath of fresh air! I'm sick of those 'pseudo-cool' mags that examine every movie like it was under a magnifying glass...dissecting plotlines and philosophies until all the enjoyment is gone. ATC has the right attitude. Don't change!!!!

You can help me win a \$50 bet. Even though Tsui Hark wasn't listed as an actor in *A Better Tomorrow 1*, didn't he have a brief part as one of the music critics -- the one who got his car window busted?..(if the answer is 'no' don't run this letter, maybe I can still win the bet..my friend Jimmy is pretty stupid).

Keep up the great job,

→ Robert Kosina

the profuse contents, I came across one or two small errors worth correcting (after all, as you say in the editorial: 'we live and learn') {yes, and we are grateful for any and all information and corrections, Ed}.

© *Anal-retentive quibble #1*: The *Black Magic 3* (aka *Black Magic Terror*) entry states that said film is of Filipino/Hong Kong extraction. Not so. It is actually a co-production between Indonesia and Japan. Also, I don't know where Tom got that 'Lawrence Chee' director credit (from the Venezuela 'Video Show ADP' release, under the title 'Black Magic 3, Ed') -- both the *Black Magic Terror* print (Transworld/Twilight Video) and *The Queen Of Black Magic* print (Lettuce Entertain You, Inc.) list the director as one 'L. Soejono.' Go figure.

© *Big Chest War* sounds thematically very similar to a 1968 Kaidan/Kaijuigen film, *Toku Daisenso* (aka *Spook Warfare*; note similarity of English titles), which was directed by Yoshiyuki Kuroda. These are obviously two different films, but possibly each or based on a similar tale from Asiatic legend? Only Horacio Naguchi might know for sure...

© *Bride From Hades* shares its title with a 1968 Kaidan directed by Seisaku Yamamoto, called *Bozo Doro* (translates to *Bride From Hades*). Could be just a coincidence, or maybe both films are derived from the same source material (?). Just thought you'd like to know.

Sincerely,

→ Steve Fenton

Hello Craig:

I see Tom Weissner raised his 'Jackie Chan has made a name for himself by doing stylized 'Police Action' Kung-Fu films that (mostly) resemble a televised, stunt-laden 'Movie Of The Week' line about which I complained to him when it came out in *Naked! Screaming! Terror! Before Armor Of God*, Jackie had only done two cop films, *Police Story* and *The Protector*, unless you include his Sammo Hung directed *Witness And Sinners* and two of the four *Lucky Stars* films. But he became Asia's #1 star years before that for his period Kung Fu comedies like *Snake In The Eagle's Shadow*, *Drunken Tiger Is A Monkey's Eye*, *The Fearless Hyena*, *The Young Master*, *Dragon Lord* (okay, Bill, I believe you--just don't make me watch 'em, Ed). Most recently, he has joined the new "gun-action" trend with projects like *Island On Fire*, *Twin Dragons*, and *Police Story 3*.



Good news! Not only did you win the bet, but we'll print a pic of Tsui Hark to help you prove your case. However, we expect a communiqué.

Dear Craig:

Just a note in response to the (as-expected) impressive debut-ish of ETC's 'bastard stepbrother' ATC..great stuff! Whilst poring thru

Beach Of The War Gods was written, directed and starring Wang Yu, aka Jimmy Wang Yu of the George Lazenby-starrer *The Man From Hong Kong*.

...For years I've been trying to get people to see the Hong Kong films which have excited me only to see *The Killer* become perhaps the most famous and widely seen Chinese film, of recent vintage, in the United States, and I don't like the film (You and I have a major disagreement here, Ed.) I hope those who don't like *The Killer* won't be dissuaded from seeing the good ones like *A Better Tomorrow*, *Peking Opera Blues*, *A Chinese Ghost Story*, and the films of Chang Cheh.

...The husband in *Seedling Of A Ghost* is Kao Pei, who now goes under the name Philip Ko, and played the villain in *Cypress Tigers* as well as appearing opposite Richard Harrison in some of those dreadful Ninja flicks.

...One can't fault Tom for his dedication to the Horrors from Hong Kong and thereabouts. He's covered dozens and dozens of titles that are mostly unknown, at least to me. However, we obviously have different tastes for this kind of thing as he gives *Seventh Curse* **** and *Nine Demons* **.

ATC #1 is a good looking issue, though not quite as slick as *ETC*. Congratulations on the color covers.

Ciao,

* Bill Connolly

Dear Asian Trash Cinema:

Thanks for a wonderful issue. It'll be a big help as I travel around to the Chinese video stores in my city. (God I didn't even know these things existed until *Naked! Screaming!* *Fear!*...a special thanks to Tom Wassner...for then and now).

I also want to thank you for printing the photo of John Woo. Even though it was very dark, it still put one of my biggest fears to rest. I was under the impression that he was the nerdy jerk from the film *I Love Maria*. I feel better now.

And I especially want to thank you guys for the back cover of *Asian Trash Cinema #1*. Evelyn Kraft is remarkable! I don't think I've ever seen a more inviting 'fuck-me' pic. Where can I find a poster of this woman?

Sincerely,

* George Patino

Thanks for the kind words. And regarding Evelyn Kraft, I suggest that you contact Conrad Widener. He's forming the fan club just as soon as his hands are free.

Dear Craig and ATC staff:

I received *ATC #1* a few days ago. Thanks. I found it an excellent read. One thing I found as an added bonus was the inclusion of release (and production) dates. Future issues should also be great, especially if Tom continues his 'Dead And The Deadly' series and format is similar to *ETC*.

One point on Tom's review of *Zombie Vs. Ninja*...he states that there are no zombies in it, only in the opening sequence. It was released here (England) as *Zombie Ninja: The Super Ninja Master* and it contained quite a few sequences with the living dead, on some occasions called zombies and sometimes called ghosts. The codin-maker uses the reanimated corpses to teach his young apprentice the martial arts. In my view, the film is spoiled by the ninja inserts. Another Joseph Lau presentation *Diamond Ninja Force* (aka *Diamond Ninja Ghost*) was similarly ruined with Richard Harrison/ninja inserts.

Simon Smith, England

Thanks for the letter. It sounds like you guys have a different cut of *Zombie Vs. Ninja* than the one available in the United States. Who knows how many different versions are available internationally. And I wonder if the Hong Kong versions include the ninja footage obviously designed for the western markets. -Tom

Dear Craig,

I've finally read *ATC #1*. I think that your readers should be aware that the years indicated in Tom Wassner's capsule reviews are, for the most part, not the years of production, but rather the years in which the films were copyrighted for export. In many cases the films are older than indicated in *ATC*. For example, *A Better Tomorrow* is from 1989, not 1991.

I've also spotted some minor mistakes, after comparing the data in *ATC* with my Hong Kong sources. Here are some: Ringo Lam directed *Happy Ghost 3* (the Chinese world of credits continues to be very confusing, our print of this film distinctly gives director credit to Tsui Hark, Ed); *Acres Go Places 3* was made in '82, but actually released in '84; To Kai Fun (co-director of *Big Heat*) is better known as Johnny To (see *All About Ah-Long*); Ho Manga can also (and more correctly) be written Ho Meng-Hue (in the 'Wade' system) or He Meng (in 'Pinyin'). I guess you are aware that 'Wade' and 'Pinyin' are the two official systems of transcription for the Chinese language. Thus Ho Manga is a distortion of the correct Wade (Anglo-Chinese) transcription.

(However, note that 'No Manga' is the way it appears in the 'Gollathon' and 'Black Magic' title-credit sequences. Ed.)

Actor-turned-director Lo Lieh's career is the most impressive! He was in Antonio Margheriti's *Blood Money*, but before that he had become a superstar with *Five Fingers Of Death* (1972). In 1973, in an interview with an Italian weekly magazine, he said he had already acted in about 50 films: it would be wonderful if some of your contributors tracked down his filmography and career (anywhere? Ed).

The Deadly And The Deadly (original title: *Ren Xia Ren = Man Scars Man*) is from 1982!

Diary Of A Big Man is directed by Chot Yuen (our English copy reads C. Yun How, perhaps an Anglo variation? Ed.); *Forbidden Arsenal* is also known as *In The Line Of Duty 5* in some markets; Wong C. Keung (Guusman) is better known as Kirk Wong. *Magic Cop* is directed by Tung Wei; *Police Story 1* is from 1985; *Police Story 2* is from 1987.

Take care,

* Simone Romano, Italy

to Asian Trash Cinema.

For your immediate correction in the next scheduled edition(s) of *ATC*, please note the following factual errors that should assist your readers in better locating certain videos they may want:

The *In The Line Of Duty* pics are not only presented out-of-order, they are not even identified by these titles in North America! Most folks in North America know them by the series titles used in several Asian territories and on the video artwork for the bunch, being deceptive but no less distinct, *Yes, Madam* (Regardless, the English language print used for our reviews clearly identify the series as *In The Line Of Duty*. Ed.)

The feature that *ATC* (mis)identifies as *In The Line Of Duty #1* is, in fact, known by most folk as Michelle Khan's *Royal Warriors*...no matter if it be the Chinese, Japanese, or Korean video version; further, it is definitely not the first movie in the series. (Again, this is a peculiar criticism since our English language print is called *In The Line Of Duty* and it is promoted as the first in the series. Ed.)

The feature (mis)identified as *In The Line Of Duty #2* should be called *Yes, Madam #1: The Middle Man* and is fifth in order, being the third and thus-far final Cynthia Khan (aka Yang Li

Chuang) pic. (This information is erroneous according to the previous letter from Simone Romano, *Forbidden Arsenal* is known as 'In The Line Of Duty #5' throughout Europe and Asia. Ed.)

The feature (mis)identified as *In The Line Of Duty #3* is (incorrectly identified as another in the sense when it has no real connection save the presence of star Yang (Cynthia Khan) and never does claim any real link all North American titles are supplements *Queen's High*. [In your zeal to criticize, you neglect to mention that we also refer to this film under the alternative title 'Queen's High.' But, as confirmed in Richard Akiyama's excellent *SKAM Magazine*, it is known in some markets as 'In The Line Of Duty 5.' Ed.]

For the benefit of connoisseurs who want to search out the bunch, this is the official (by whose credentials? Ed.) and correct order of the five action movies: *Yes, Madam* (starring Michelle Khan, aka Yoch Chu Kang, and Cynthia Rothrock), *Royal Warriors* (Yoch and Hanyuk Sanada), *In The Line Of Duty 3* (Cynthia Khan, aka Yang Li Chiang), *Yes, Madam 4* (Yang), *Yes, Madam 5: The Middle Man* (Yang).

To further complicate what is already supremely confusing to many, *Yes, Madam* and *Royal Warriors* are known in Germany as *Ultra Force*; in the UK the entire series is scrambled beyond any hope of order; and Korean videos mix and match the series with other HK actioners unrelated to the series.

Now you know why the ritual is called a Chinese Fire Drill...

(For better or worse, S. C. Dacy continues with more of the same; these are the highlights of his letter. We will mercifully withhold comment. Ed.)

Armour Of God 2 is the combined effort(s) of Jackie Chan himself and the underrated Franklin Chan who goes shockingly unexamined in *ATC #1* despite numerous highly popular directorial efforts and big roles in assorted HK classics

A Better Tomorrow 1 and *2* are credited to the now-known John Woo, but insiders know the heavy hands of Tsui Hark are all over both; in HK circles, Woo himself disowns the sequel...

Chinese Ghost Story is primarily Tsui Hark's undisguised work. *Fighting Wrong* must be better credited to the name Yuan Kwei, better known as the 'Corey Yuen' of *No Retreat, No Surrender #1* plus the terrific action-sequence direction of Meng Ho.

Spooky! Spooky! Spooky! is basically the ghost-direction of Samo Hung from *Painted Faces* and *Eastern Condors*.

...Angels Mission is the singular Angel Mission..Tsui Hark's family name is Tsui, not Hark!..

Karl Makai is either Mak Kai or Karl Mak..Hung Kam Bo is Hung Kam Po..Island On Fire is Island Of Fire..Kung Fu Wonder Child is officially misspelled as Kung Fu..

Now that we have scratched the surface of what ATC #1 includes, what of the hundreds and even thousands of well-known hit features mysteriously ignored and/or unmentioned?

→ S. C. Decay / Adventurous Productions, Inc.

Regarding your closing question: Please, we are begging you, write the definitive book. Just don't bother us with anymore of your anal rumblings. And, truthfully, if Kung Fu Wonder Child is officially misspelled as Kung Fu, somebody forgot to tell the company who released it (see insert).



Greetings Craig and Tom,

Many thanks for the copy of Asian Trash Cinema. Without further ado, here are my initial reactions to it:

The layout and readability of the issue were superior. The back cover photo of Evelyn Kraft was very nice (to say the least). Tom Weisser must be some kind of superhuman zombie to be able to sit through so many flicks and still find the

strength to wax eloquently about them. Though some of the capsule reviews appeared previously in *NISHT!*, the addition of hundreds of new listings more than made up for it. Some of the movies I have never heard of before and would love to get a chance to see. Tom's knowledge of HK cinema and its stars shows a definite improvement over his *NISHT!* contribution. Overall *Asian Trash Cinema #1* was an excellent piece of work and a very handy piece of reference material for Asian movie fans. I'm sure this 'zine will have as long and successful a run as its sister, *ETC.* I especially liked The Big Heat review Jeff Chun got a kick out of it when I showed him the review.

Enough gushing for now though. As with any piece of groundbreaking literature, a number of misplaced facts and minor errors show up; God knows my magazine *SEAM* is as guilty of this as any other 'zine. There are probably other readers who will be only too eager to flaunt their "superior" knowledge by pointing out mistakes, but the ones I managed to spot were...the photo insert in the Anger review looks like a shot of Elisabeth Lee from *Widow Warriors* (very keen and observant. And correct Ed)...in the City War review, Danny Lee is listed as one of the stars although it was Ti Lung who co-starred opposite Chow Yun Fat..*God Of Gamblers* was directed by Wong Ching, not Sun Chung. Wong definitely directed *God Of Gamblers 3*, too..*Iceman Cometh* was directed by Pak Tiu Leung, a recent *Fatal Weapon* curiously listed Tsui Siu Ming as the director. There is also another Chinese movie with this exact same title. (Confusing, yes? Ed.)

I'm not certain if that Inside cover photo was of Lin Chung-Hua. It could very well be, but I'll have to check up on it. Rarely, will you see a prominent Chinese actress (excluding Amy Yip, who by the way was the "big breasted beauty" referred to in the *Ghostly Vixen* review) go topless.

Other than these minor quibbles, ATC delivers a wealth of incredible information. My highest regards to Tom Weisser,
Best wishes,

→ Richard A. Akiyama / *SEAM Magazine*

Thanks for the kind letter and the additional information. Regarding your comment, I also had heard that Chinese actresses refuse to do nude scenes, but now, after seeing literally hundreds of Asian films, I must believe that either the "rumor" wasn't true or that it is a practice since laid to rest. As demonstrated with a large number of in-the-news pics in the last issue of ATC, nudity is commonplace in many Chinese films. -Tom



the Hong Kong girl from ATC's cover, beautiful actress McLaren Li

Asian Trash Cinema Reviews

DEVILS DYNAMITE

Star Classics Video. Filmark Int.,
 Tomas Tong Prod. Directed by Joe Livingstone
 with Mick Stuart, Walter Bond, Richard Philips
 reviewed by JOHN THONEN

If you've been a fan of foreign produced exploitation films for a while you've undoubtedly come across anglicized credits. As a fairly new convert to Asian Cinema I was a little surprised to see that this tape uses the same technique. Luigi Montefiori might pass as being George Eastman but no one is going to accept any of the cast of this film as being named Walter Bond. Still, since almost nothing else on the video box has any bearing on the film within, this type of subterfuge is not too surprising.

The box art depicts several black clad bazooka-wielding ninjas doing battle with a helicopter. The photo on the back shows a man cowering in a auto junkyard beneath the spotlight of a helicopter. There's no helicopter in this film, there's no bazookas, come to think of it, there's no dynamite either. There are some ninjas, some vampires and, I think, two different films herein. Luckily, the tape description is fairly accurate in proclaiming a story of gangsters, cops and vampires so I grabbed it up off the rack at my local Wal-Mart for just \$8.98 (before tax of course).

The two nearly unconnected storylines featured here involve a recently paroled underworld leader who finds that while he's been in prison his empire has been taken over by his former girlfriend, Mary. She's engaged to marry a cop, who thinks she's pure as the driven snow, and everyone wants to kill him. There are a few lines of dialogue that imply that Mary is using vampires to muscle in on other gang's territory but the hopping bloodsuckers are never seen in any of the footage involving the characters in the crime story. Since all the dialogue is dubbed it was probably pretty easy to add these lines in to give a shred of connection between two plots and sets of characters.

There are vampires though, and a Taoist monk who helps a young man fight them. They are

under the control of a renegade monk and a Westerner (one can only wonder if one of the western names in the credits is actually this guy). The good monk transforms the young man into a mighty warrior, complete with silver lame suit and motorcycle helmet, who looks like he took a wrong turn on his way to the auditions for the new Ultraman. This happens near the end of the film, even though the costumed hero appears several times earlier in the film to battle the forces of evil. Guess he should have fought for the forces of continuity too.

There's really no point in trying to make sense of this mishmash. Two popular Hong Kong storylines, the melodramatic gangster/gambler and hopping vampires are simply combined here to make one film, sorta, that offers something for almost everyone. There are lots of Fu fighting, explosions, gun fire and bloodsuckers. There's virtually no blood, no sex and no nudity, so hard core sleaze mavens will probably be bored. For the rest of us, there's worse ways to spend ninety minutes and seven bucks.

SEEDING OF A GHOST

reviewed by STEVE FENTONE

I wanted my first submission to ETC's spin-off sister zine to be a real doozy: a title that truly justifies being labeled Asian Trash Cinema. This baby is surely it, in SPADESH!

Produced somewhere between 1973 and the early '80s by my most humble estimation, Yang Chuan's *SEEDING OF A GHOST* is the type of down-n-dirty straight-faced sleazefest that seems to be rarely made anymore in Hong-Kong. It tastelessly copulates low-brow exploitation with even lower-brow gags and grue. While the recent soft-porn *EROTIC GHOST STORY* films certainly don't skimp on showing acres of naked skin, they lack this film's exceedingly visceral-cums-genital perspective. Some might initially be surprised to see such an unrepentant scuzzathon presented by none other than "respectable" Run Run Shaw, until you remember that Ho Mang-Hua's depraved *BLACK MAGIC* duet were also lensed under the

auspices of the prolific Shaw Brothers. An early pre-latory glimpse of our Oriental heroine, Irene, rolling a sheer, black nylon onto an outstretched hand hints at the innate sexplotative angle; later topless skinny-dipping filmed in slo-mo to best highlight jiggling rags, and full-frontal shower soap-downs by our uninhibited leading lady keep the T&A factor high. Every possible excuse is taken to segue into some softcore sexual coupling focused on nubile Asiatic assets (accent on the *ass!*). But, lest we forget, this is a horror film too, eh?

Anyway, Irene (I have no idea of any of the actors' names; probably unknown) is a married woman getting a bit on the side from a man who's also married. The film drags mostly during mandatory "character development" scenes of bickering adulterers and other sluggish soap operas. Things take a more mean-spirited turn when Irene is sexually molested by two creeps at an old dark house. The following rape scene is needlessly extended and violent (surprisingly so considering *SEEDING!* was co-produced by a woman). During the course of her violation, Irene ends up stumbling off the house roof to her gory death on some nasty metal spikes (gotta watch out for those).

Her taxi-driver husband is subsequently implicated in his spouse's murder by suspicious police, who accuse him of committing the homicide on account of her (to quote the subtitle) *cuckoldry*. Irene's lover, Fang Ming, is also a prime suspect. Hubby is determined to solve and/or avenge Irene's foul murder. Meanwhile, the two real culprits conspire to off the husband because he had witnessed them fleeing the crime scene. This cues the obligatory sloppy kung-fu street brawl, then still another when hubby tackles his late wife's two-timing boyfriend with an metal baseball bat.

To make a long, convoluted story short, a shaggy-wigged, evil mystic grudgingly agrees (via blackmail) to help the husband's cause by utilizing pagan black magic. It's bug-sucking time! This surly shaman oversees exhumation of Irene's lengthily-interred cadaver (which is by now a withered, mummified husk). An ensuing spell causes one of the scummy rapists to upchuck a wriggling mouthful of disgustingly authentic wormlike; before you can sing 'Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, guess I'll go eat worms', the other rapist ends up ingesting gloppy, pink brain matter from what he mistakenly believes is a fresh coconut (if I didn't know better,

an unforgettable moment from *Seedling Of A Ghost*



I'd almost swear this cerebral snack scene was plagiarized from *THE BRAINWACH*!).

SEEDING!'s queasy fascination with noxious eating habits and vile bodily functions/secrections is derived from a vital facet of Asian superstitious magic. In Hong Kong horror flicks, 'evil' invariably means fucking disgusting.

Irene is somehow transformed into what the dodgy, semi-legible sub-titles call a "Plasawa" (a so-called "Venus"). The shaman instructs the husband to actually kiss his wife's desecrated corpse in a touching scene well pre-dating *NEKROMANTIK* for all those who think Bongunil invented onscreen corpse-coupling. There is overall too much bizarre and twisted behavior on display to bear fully cataloguing here (don't wanna ruin all the surprises, now do I?).

Suffice to say, there is enough gratuitous flesh, impromptu projectile vomiting and thinly-disguised foot fetishism (i.e. - frequent obvious closeups of girls' pointed and painted toenails) to cater to even the most jaded Western appetite (that means *YOU*).

One guy experiences the worst kind of colitis interruptus when his back (in mid-bell) begins to painfully throb from within, resulting in a mostly red partial eruption of spinal column through his flesh. The stricken man then slavishly crawls to the Plasawa corpse, which levitates above him engulfed in demonic, blue optics while in the process of totally absorbing his new life essence. What's left of Irene (not to damn fucking much) then partly reconstitutes her shrivelled anatomy

This particular commonplace Oriental plot detail (see *A CHINESE GHOST STORY* among others) probably inspired the soul-sucking space-vampires of Tobe Hooper's loony *LIFEFORCE*, now that I think about it.

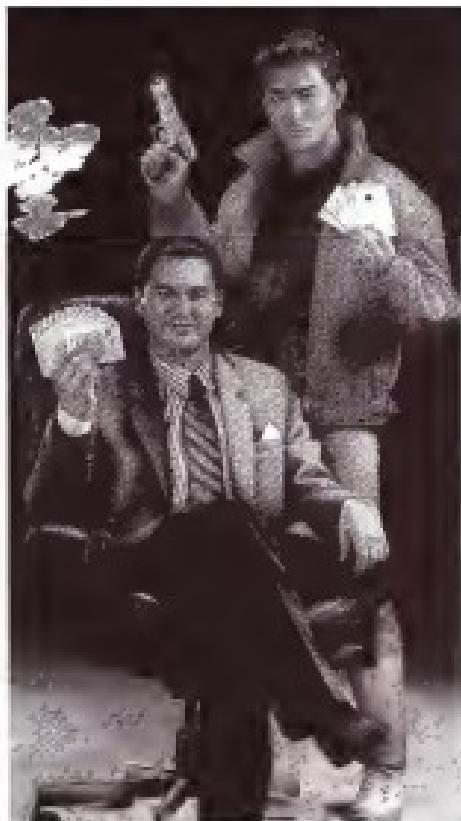
The exciting pre-climax offers a well-choreographed dazzle show of wind-whipped bliss and magenta smoke and wired flying gongs as a good Buddhist priest combats the evil pagan wizard. Conflict is usually a staple in films of this 'evil spell' sub-gaze.

Exotic spell recipes dabble in both the fiscal and the fatal: dwelling on an erupting toilet-bowl and an exploding womb (wait for it) with equal relish. Such nauseating frissons can only cause our unaccustomed round eyes to blink in alienated amazement.

And, speaking of *ALIEN*-ation, the resultant birth of a face-hugging, embryonic blob-thing that blossoms instantaneously into a toothy, tentacled jam-monster can only be classified as *Ogre-seque* (by way of H. P. Lovecraft and Japanese "Obaku" {transforming things} tradition). Effects here often seem rubberized and crude, but are catapulted off the screen with a pulley panache that goes straight for the gonads and bites. The final fifteen minutes total a guaranteed head-turner that'll have you gagging on your chicken chow mein. *REVENGE OF THE ZOMBIES* (aka *BLACK MAGIC II*) is still my favorite film of this grubby type, although that's not to say that *SEEING OF A GHOST* ain't well worth a gander too. By all means check out its perverse brand of chopstick chunder next time you're hungry for something oozy, goosy *GODD*.

Being witness to some of the unchecked depravity on display here, it makes you wonder just what the HELL Queen Liz was thinking when she bestowed a knighthood on Sir Run Run...?

GAMBLERS, GAMBLING GHOST, etc.: But out of this pus-pool of ripoffs came a surprise hit, *ALL FOR THE WINNER* (1990). Starring Stephen Chow (aka Chow Sing Chu, who had previously appeared in *MY HERO*, a spoof of gangster flicks) as Chow Sing Cho, 'the Saint of Gamblers,' a country bumpkin with magical powers. He can change the face of a playing card, cause his opponents to see illusions, telekinetically move objects, and get free sodas from vending machines. His Uncle Blackie (played by an actor I've yet to identify) exploits his nephew's abilities, leading to various misadventures. The result was a surprise hit that shot Stephen Chow into superstardom. *ALL FOR THE WINNER* made some very funny (and accurate) jabs at *GOD OF GAMBLERS* and Chow Yun Fat's extramarital persons. So when Yun Fat declined to appear in *GOD OF GAMBLERS 2*, producers decided to team Andy Lee with Stephen and Blackie.



original art-work for *God Of Gamblers 3* featuring Chow Yun-Fat and Andy Lee

GOD OF GAMBLERS 3: BACK TO SHANGHAI (1991)

reviewed by JOHN GRACE

GOD OF GAMBLERS was HK's top grossing film of 1989. As an entertaining comedy-drama, it matched HK's two most popular (and highest paid, with the exception of Sam Hui) actors, Chow Yun Fat and Andy Lee. Earlier collaborations included *RICH & FAMOUS* and *TRAGIC HERO*, but neither were as popular as this impressive *CINCINNATI KID/RAINMAN* knockoff. True to the nature of HK Cinema, it spawned dozens of plagiarisms (*CASINO RAIDERS*, *TRICKY GAMBLER*, *KING OF*

It was an offbeat idea (imagine Clint Eastwood with Leslie Nielsen in a *DIRTY HARRY* film), but the formula worked. *GOD OF GAMBLERS 2* made a lot of yen, so now the series has been officially passed to Stephen and Blackie. *GOD OF GAMBLERS 3* is an all-out Stephen Chow comedy, leading the series into a new direction: a slapstick, time-traveling fantasy. It must have clicked with HK audiences, because this sequel pulled in more than \$31,145,182 HK dollars when it was released.

The evil paranormal that Chow defeated in the previous sequel assembles a gang of psychics to get revenge. They attack Chow and Uncle Blackie in a magic battle, spoofing Tsui Hark's *ZU, WARRIORS FROM THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN*. The sorcery duel results in Chow, Blackie, and the evil psychic getting sucked up into a time warp, sending them back to Shanghai, 1937.

Caught between warring triad gangs, Chow meets his grandfather (a dead ringer for Uncle Blackie, and played by the same actor) and is recruited by triad boss, Ding Fok (Ricky Liu, of *TO BE NUMBER ONE* and *DEADLY DEAL*) to help him oust a Japanese General and her army. Meanwhile, the Japanese have captured Uncle Blackie and enlisted the services of the evil psychic. In between the Kungfu, gunfire, gambling, and rescue attempts, is a romance between Chow and the twin sister of Ding Fok's fiance. The twist here is that poor Chow has the mentality of a six year old, so she sees our hero as a big brother than a boyfriend. It's not as tasteless as it reads here.

Back in 1991, Loong Shan (the pale-eyed bodyguard from the previous films) is gathering a team of paranormals to bring Chow and Blackie back to the future. All this insanity culminates into a very funny fight scene between Chow and a Japanese strongman, a shootout in the Japanese fortress, and a poker showdown with a French God of Gamblers (employed by the Japanese, since the evil psychic was no match for Chow).

While many of the jokes have been done before, Chow manages to inject some freshness to these well-worn cliches of Chinese Cinema (Bruce Lee mimicry, impersonating a priest during a confession to take advantage of a girl, sitting on a cobra, etc.). Although he can be vulgar and does a lot of camera mugging, Stephen is still a worthwhile comic actor. There are many hilarious scenes, my favorite being a surreal dance number in a Shanghai deli. Chow and Blackie do Fred Astaire moves to a song about Chinese pork

bacon! There is also a clever chase sequence through downtown Shanghai, with Chow climbing through scaffolding and rooftops, obviously mocking *PROJECT A*.

Complex, exciting, surprising and always amusing, *GOD OF GAMBLERS 3* is an excellent introduction to Cantonese comedy. It's also the best movie of the trilogy, with more originality and imagination than the previous entries.

NOTE: Prior to *GOD OF GAMBLERS 3* was *TRICKY BRAINS*, another comedy featuring Chow Sing Che and Uncle Blackie. Although I have not seen it, I'm sure it is worth seeing.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA

Film Workshop - Golden Harvest 1991

Director: Tsui Hark

reviewed by ERIK SULEV

For the last decade, the multi-talented Tsui Hark (or Hark Tsui if you prefer to read his name in the Western format), has produced and directed some of the most stylized and entertaining features to come out of Hong Kong. Sure there are numerous other directors (excluding John Woo, who, like Tsui is an exception), who deliver entertaining product, but the bulk of their films lack the unique character and personality that Tsui's (and Woo's) projects, continually display.

Tsui has been very busy the last few years, with various productions (the *CHINESE GHOST STORY* series), some co-directing credits (*THE SWORDSMAN*, *KING OF CHESS*, and the just released Jackie Chan feature *TWIN DRAGONS*), and of course directing his own film *A BETTER TOMORROW 3*. His most recent work to hit local Chinatown screens (and Taiwanese video), is the incredible *ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA*. Clocking in at a 135 minutes, *ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA* should rightfully be considered Tsui's first epic film production.

Filled with numerous sub-plots, Chinese cultural references and symbolism, as well as the usual grand assortment of characters, the complexities of the film are enormous as Tsui attempts to present an accurate depiction of the "Chinese identity" as well as providing some of the best action and kung-fu sequences we've seen in years. Above all, *ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA* is Tsui's version of all those period-piece kung-fu films of the seventies that you either love or dread. This time however, Tsui makes a film

so good, that even those who have little time for kung-fu hijinx, will be entertained. As for the rest of us who appreciate these finer things, ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA has all the slam-bang action we could possibly want, delivered with Tsui's clever direction and wit, and edited with his usual smooth but sharp precision.

Starring Chinese mainland kung-fu star Jet Lee (his numerous SHAOLIN TEMPLE films have just been re-released on laser-disc), as Master Wong Fey Hong, who is chosen to organize an army to fight the imperialist foreigners that are draining China of both its wealth and heritage. As if his life isn't already difficult enough, Wong has to look after Yee, (Rosamund Kwan) a foreign-educated cousin who has just returned from England. Yee's foreign ways frequently clash with Wong's traditional methods and Chinese nationalism, a symbolic reference to China's relations with the Western world. But what would an epic be without a love story, and Tsui gradually brings the two closer together as they learn to respect each other's ways. Symbolic purposes aside, Tsui also realizes that if Yee is going to get kidnapped by the bad guys, Wong is going to try a lot harder to get her back if he is in love with her!



Rosamund Kwan from Once Upon A Time in China

Wong's chief disciple/student is 'Bucktooth Soi' played by an almost unrecognizable Jackie Cheung (he was Frank in BULLET IN THE HEAD). Rounding out the cast are Kent Cheng who appropriately portrays 'Chubby', and personal favorite Yuen Biao as Fu, a stagehand for a travelling theater group who wants to join up with Wong, but gets mixed up with Wong's deadly rival, Master 'Iron Robo' Yim.

gang of Triad extortionists called the Shaho Gang, who are not only financing Yim in his attempts to kill Wong in a martial arts battle to the death, but are also in cahoots with the villainous, American, Mr. Jackson (who is very proficient in kung-fu), and British Governor Wickens, who, with the firepower of his colonial army, seeks to strip China of its wealth, and put it in his own pockets! If this isn't complicated enough, try figuring everything out when the subtitles that are stretched to fill out a theatrical composition of 2.35:1 are cropped off for a regular television aspect ratio! Hopefully the laser-disc release will be letterboxed!

As you can probably guess, there's a great deal of storytelling squeezed into this picture, some impatient complaints who have watched one too many ANGEL movies may even feel that there is too much story in ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA. Sure there's lots of story, but in no way does Tsui ever sidlop on the action sequences. To begin with, there's an attack with flaming arrows on Wong's clinic; an attack on a Chinese junk by the Shaho and Wickens' forces in an attempt to assassinate Wong, and later on Yee is kidnapped by the Shaho gang, who not only want to make her a whore for the American laborers but to draw Wong into Yim's trap as well! The climactic battle inside the enemy compound is absolutely incredible, with just about everyone taking a shot at, or a flying kick at everyone else. To top things off, there are lots of ladders and wooden beams, which allows for some dynamic kung-fu choreography which is enhanced even further with Tsui's rapid-fire editing! Imagine the fighting taking place in a massive, moving wooden 'cradle' and you'll begin to get the idea!

For a good part of the fighting, Yuen Biao is strung up in a most uncomfortable way, but is finally untied to do some serious damage on Mr. Jackson. It's too bad that we don't get to see more of Yuen's fighting skills, but he always shines even in the briefest of moments. It's great to see him back with Tsui Hark since their previous collaboration IN THE WARRIORS FROM MAGIC MOUNTAIN, is an incredible display of kung-fu, supernatural forces, and optical effects that eventually numbs the viewer since there is always something going on!

The real (and deserved) star this time out however is Jet Lee, who is already getting much more exposure as a result of this film. If you've only heard about him, then here's a great chance to check out his skills. Although he's involved in

minor skirmishes throughout the film, Lee finally explodes while fighting the Shaho, Wickson's forces, and finally Master Yim at the end of the picture.

To cap things off, Wong Fey Hong finishes off Mr. Jackson by flicking a bullet at super-speed with his fingers at the American's head! While all this is happening, Bucktooth Sol tricks the other Yanks into firing a cannonball through Wickson's ship, and last, but not least, the whores rounded up by the Shaho, stuff the triad's leader Hung (not Hong, that's the good guy) into a hot oven!

ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA is a pleasant change from the numerous gambling films, and **A CHINESE GHOST STORY** and **THE KILLER** rip-offs that are being produced in droves. Filled with likable heroes and dastardly villains (all of whom get what they deserve), the film should exhilarate both those new to Hong Kong cinema, along with those who grew up seeing kung-fu classics either at the grindhouse or on Saturday afternoon television. Although the budget of **ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA** probably pales compared to American action spics, nothing ever looks cheap, nor ever comes across as being rushed in order to save a few dollars. Never hampered by ineffective unions or difficult movie-stars, Teui has created an exceptional piece of entertainment, that will stand as an example for years to come. What are you waiting for? If you haven't seen **ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA** put it on your priority list!

THE BIG HEAT

Directed by Andrew Lam / To Kit Fan
reviewed by JEFF SEGAL

Hong Kong based producer, director and performer Teui Hark is finally achieving Western world recognition, primarily because he backed the enchanting **CHINESE GHOST STORY** fantasies and action auteur John Woo's oriental operas of harlam and gleeful blood spillage. In the past few years, several lesser known films credited to Hark have stormed out of Hong Kong. One impressive piece of work is **THE BIG HEAT**, a stylish police thriller mating noirish imagery with explicit violence. In this one, Hark served as producer.

Set in and around a corrupt Hong Kong, **THE BIG HEAT** immediately slams us into the dilemma of Chief Inspector Wanpong Wong. Recurrent bouts of nerve paralysis in his right hand are edging the intense young cop toward a suspension. After he hears that his police

informant pal Skinny Tee was slaughtered in Malaysia, the Inspector eagerly re-holsters the 38 revolver and prepares for what may be his final case.

A grumpy Malaysian Inspector, Choi Fu Ong, accompanies skinny's crispy remains back into Hong Kong. Braced with support from Ong, a veteran police officer named Kam and an awkward rookie, Lun, Inspector Wong begins scalping his way through HK's white collar crime, in search of Tee's executioners. He discovers that a wealthy businessman is being blackmailed into servitude by a Hong Kong gangster.

Skinny Tee paid with his life for attempting to pressure money from the wrathful criminal. Resisting bribes, Inspector Wong and his untrustables duel thugs, rival law officers and heavily armed assassins in a series of increasingly bloody encounters. Finally, Wong and his surviving men battle against the gangleader himself and the corruption from within the Royal Police.

This kinetic thriller benefits from the welcomed Hark polish. A simple but exotic musical score compliments the pacing of **THE BIG HEAT**. Although not as striking in appearance as Woo's **THE KILLER** and the **A BETTER TOMORROW** films, the visual aspect of the cop movie renders it palatable to jaded audiences weaned on the big budget gloss of **BLACK RAIN** (1989) and **DIE HARD** (1988), both of which were effective actioners in their own right. The productions attributed to Hark boast a quality far removed from the occasionally tattered kungfu-fests that preceded the new wave genre releases of Hong Kong.

THE BIG HEAT is stitched together by tight editing which does accelerate several fight scenes, making it difficult for unprepared viewers to grasp what is happening. The overall effect of this brand of cinematic carnage is to sledgehammer the nerves. For all of its stylistic excess, **THE BIG HEAT** perfectly complements the character of Inspector Wong. As portrayed by Waipoong Lee (who starred in Woo's **A BULLET IN THE HEAD**), Wong stands out against his less brooding, equally talented co-stars. His habit of focusing rage against suspects, the enemy or even himself, is somewhat startling; the Inspector can in no way be compared to the laid back Chinese policeman stereotypes populating many Asian films. His ailing hands distract him to the point where he daydreams that a power drill through the palm bursts him apart. Wong permits a

lit match held in his right fist to burn down against the flesh.

The Inspector aborts the robbery attempt which opens *THE BIG HEAT* quite effectively—after having his partner leg shoot a human shield held by the cornered thug, Wong forces his bad hand to operate and caps the suddenly vulnerable deviant, pancaking the man's brains against the wall.

During a repulsive autopsy scene, the Inspector gazes emotionless at the steaming char belonging to the recently incinerated Skinny Tee. Another cop staggers out of the room to puke into a water fountain. Although anger doesn't strip away his professional veneer, Wong's subsequent actions reveal a growing fury. The Inspector and his men Dirty Harry their prime suspect into attempting suicide. Even in the hospital, Wong proceeds to intimidate a confession out of the man. Andrew Lam may not achieve the fame of other Asian action directors but his film is memorable. *THE BIG HEAT* is a portrait of a hero whose overlaid behavior is justified only by the ruthlessness of his enemies.

Unlike doom-laden noir like *THE THIRD MAN* (1949) and *BLOOD SIMPLE* (1994), *THE BIG HEAT* eschews languid pacing for a swift narrative. The protagonists rocket through one unsettling incident after another. The omnipresent evildoers, collectively a personification of metropolitan anarchy, remain almost one step in front of the lawmen, casually splattering witnesses under the eyes of the police.

When Wong and his men actually grapple with the assassins, the creeps offer such violence that they must be immediately killed for safety's sake. Harmed from all sides, the Inspector cannot even expect police backup: a high ranking officer manipulates other cops against him.

Compounding the desperate situation are the bombs set in Wong's path. Death is ready to strike at anytime. At one point, a main character is wreathed with live grenades. Standard film noirish imagery ranging from whirling fans, fire (in all of its myriad forms) and menacing shadows punctuate *THE BIG HEAT*. While not unique, this thriller blends different cinematic styles into a concoction that should impress viewers who think they have seen it all.

An unflinching depiction of violence is the final ingredient to *THE BIG HEAT*'s overlaid thrust. Each piece of Paul Verhoeven styled gruesomeness is accented with a bizarre twist, almost as though the additional bit of bloodshed

were the punchline to a tasteless joke. For example, in the photoflash flashback revealing Wong's debt to Sidney Tee, the cop barges onto a drug transaction.

Blowing his cover, the informant shouts a warning and Wong wheels around to blast a thug perched behind him atop some crates. Here is where *THE BIG HEAT* gets weird. The shoulder-shot creep reels against piled sheet metal that scrapes off his head. The cranium tumbles down in slow motion, rolling between the combatants. Realizing that Tee is not kosher, another gunsel shoots the informant through the leg—we actually hear his thighbone explode. Wong's return fire blows the tough guy's gun and fist to pieces.

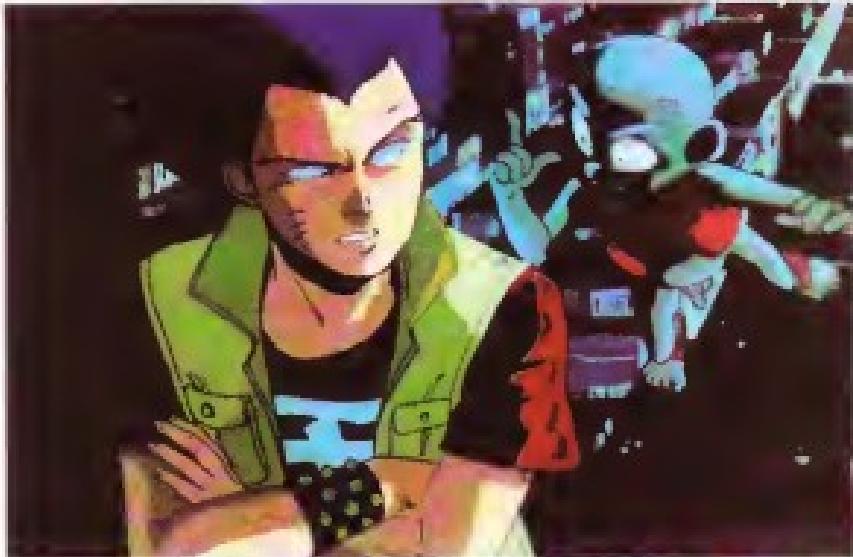
Later, the Inspector pursues an assassin onto a busy freeway. The wounded criminal stops in front of a car that cuts him off the overpass. After gaily bouncing against another car's windshield, the man is squashed by oncoming traffic and his hemorrhaging carcass slams into a curb. Roadkill rarely resembles this mess. Another fellow razors a bloodless slit through the meat of one wrist, fuses the hand and fluid sprays against his shocked face.

The camera does not cut away for our comfort. We are meant to feel the impact of every violent act. In what may be the film's most controversial sequence, a fleeing hitman showers hospital staff and children with sub-machine gun bullets in an effort to kill Wong and other officers. The baric continues into an elevator shaft where a horrific cable mishap tears the scumbag into entrail spewing body parts.

Judging from the severity of each evildoer's demise, the filmmakers may have been making a statement about Karmic retribution. The FX, as graphic as anything whipped up by Tom Savini or Gianfranco Rosi (SPFX-man for *ZOMBIE*, *THE BEYOND*, etc.) continue right into the surreal climax of *THE BIG HEAT*.

Asian and European movies are slowly gaining exposure in America. While traditional (ie mainstream) publications and critics gradually uncover foreign gems we have known about for years, die hard fans continue to dig up even more films.

As with many Hong Kong movies, *THE BIG HEAT*'s primary handicaps are its vestigial English subtitles (many USA prints have no subtitles at all). Properly subtitled, as was the early 1991 theatrical release of *THE KILLER*, this thriller and its ilk would acquire a larger (and more lucrative) following in the United States.



scenes from the Japanese Adult-Oriented Animated series *Unrotundation*

....But What Does UROTOTSUKIDŌJI Really Mean?and what-the-hell is it all about?

by Tom Weisser

For the past few years this series has been circulating in the 'collector's underground.' Most people who have seen it are - simultaneously - thrilled and amazed. It is shocking. Gory. Lurid. Sexually explicit. And animated.

Nobody is quite sure what it's called. The original Japanese name is *Urototsukidōji*. An exact translation (I am told by a friend who should know) is *Super Spider Kids*. In European circles, it's called *Legend Of The Over-Plain or Night Of The Demon*; some video enthusiasts from Poland call it *Demon Shock Zone*. Here, in the United States, the series is best known as either ① *The Wandering Kid* or ② *The Wonder Teens*.

I'm not sure where *The Wandering Kid* moniker originated. *The Wonder Teens* is a much more appropriate title, but with all the paranoia over 'what does' and 'what does not' constitute kiddie porn, it's not a very SAFE title. Especially in lieu of the XXX subject matter at hand.

Regardless of the title, the series is a remarkable achievement in state-of-the-art Japanese animation. It's probably the best of the batch. And director Hideki Takayama has made a name for himself and his studio, especially in the fast-growing world of adult-oriented animated features (also check out his series *Dreamy Express Zood*).

Urototsukidōji is co-written by Takayama's partner, Noboru Aikawa, based on a popular Japanese comic authored by Toshio Maeda. It's distributed throughout Asia by the Penthouse Magazine

organization (they keep promising a USA release; maybe, someday), but currently there is no English language version available. Anywhere.

So, obviously, the big question: What-the-hell is going on in this series??!! In order for us to truly enjoy *Urototsukidōji* beyond the obvious (and mind-shattering) shock-value, the rather complex plot needs to be annotated. Recently, a Japanese correspondent/friend, Yoshi Isehima, helped interpret the action. Here begins a synopsis of the series:

OVERVIEW

The world consists of three netherspheres. The Human world. The Manbeast world. The Demon world. Every three thousand years, the Superland is reborn. His goal is to unite the three spheres into one kingdom. This kingdom will become his domain. The superland is named Chojin.

The Human world is oblivious to Chojin.

The creatures from the Demon world, although evil by nature, also hate Chojin, and throughout the series they try to stop the Superland from his oppressive plan. However, they also hurt a number of humans along the way.

The 'people' from the Manbeast world are currently living amongst the humans, undetected. They are also trying to stop Chojin. Fortunately they have been blessed with special 'super-powers' which allow them to successfully fight most villains. The 'powers' also make them passionately sensitive and 'sexually active.'

EPISODE 1

At Myojin-Gakuen High School in Yokohama, the students are enjoying a basketball game. Bashful Nagumo has slipped into a closet adjacent to the girl's locker room and he watches through a keyhole as the cheerleaders are getting dressed. He is especially interested in Akemi, the prettiest girl in the school. Seeing her nude body has excited him and he masturbates while watching.

Nagumo's heavy breathing almost gets him caught, but he manages to escape into the basketball arena. The captain of the team, Ozaki, sees the boy enter from the 'forbidden' locker room, and he notices Nagumo's erect penis. In order to shame him, Ozaki throws the basketball at the student, hitting him squarely in the face. Everyone in the stadium begins laughing and making fun of Nagumo. He is embarrassed.

High in the rafters, above the commotion, is Amano the Cat-Boy. He is a member of the Manbeast world, but has managed to assume "human" identity and is currently attending Myojin-Gakuen High School. Cat-Boy watched Nagumo's humiliation with grim fascination, and he decides to befriend the student.

A couple days later, Nagumo and Cat-Boy notice that beautiful Akemi is taken to the sick-room by the school nurse. Unknown to Akemi, the nurse is really a monster sent from the Demon world. The creature rapes the girl in a wild frenzy, with slithering tentacles entering every possible bodily orifice. She trembles with fear, however she also feels strange sensations never experienced before. Akemi writhes and screams in erotic pleasure as her body is ravished.

From the doorway, Nagumo and Cat-Boy witness the sexual assault. Nagumo is so shocked that he faints. But, Cat-Boy, using his "super powers" goes into battle against the demon and destroys the creature. After the incident, Akemi (thinking that Nagumo saved her) befriends the bashful student. Cat-Boy is happy knowing that he has united the two young potential lovers.

Next, Cat-Boy's sister Megumi and his pet (Blue-Thing) come from the Manbeast world to warn him of "the rebirth of Chojin." The problem is nobody knows who the Superfiend really is. Cat-Boy seems to think that the high-school hero, Ozaki, is the most logical candidate.

In the meantime, the Demon World starts sending more monsters into the Human world to search for Chojin. They attack Ozaki at his apartment while he's involved in an orgy with a group of cheerleaders. The "demon possession"

has caused his penis to deform. Unknowingly, he rips the girls apart with his murderous organ, killing them all.

Blue-Thing was secretly watching the assault. He quickly flees to his master, Cat-Boy, and informs him of the bloody destruction. Believing this is proof that Ozaki is - in fact - Chojin, Cat-Boy challenges him in battle; however, he defeats Ozaki easily. So, then, who is Chojin?



Sister Megumi thinks that the Superfiend is Nagumo, but Cat-Boy disagrees. She decides to prove her point, against her brother's wishes, by seducing the student. She finds Nagumo as he's returning from a date with girlfriend Akemi.

Megumi makes a bold advance. Unzipping Nagumo's pants, she caresses his penis. The student is so shocked by her behavior that he pushes Megumi away and runs into the street where he's hit by a car. He is dead upon impact.

His ruined body is taken to the hospital morgue. Late that night, while a young nurse is making her rounds, Nagumo's body begins radiating with a diabolical aura. He becomes re-animated. And it turns out that Sister Megumi was correct after-all. Nagumo is the Superfiend, Chojin.

He attacks the nurse and (in graphic detail) rapes her. While fucking the girl, his penis grows to gargantuan size. When he comes, the nurse's body explodes in a shower of semen and gore. But this is just the beginning. He sprouts many more monstrous organs that penetrate the walls, the floors, and the very foundation of the hospital. And when he ejaculates, he causes a tidal wave of terror destroying everything in its path.

Cat-Boy and his sister protect themselves in a Manbeast bubble and, helplessly, watch the devastation rage around them.

THE END OF EPISODE ONE

Tom Weaver's extended review continues in the next issue of ATC



A Detailed Look At "Shogun Assassin"

RIVERS OF BLOOD

By Jeff Smith

"When I was little, my father was famous. He was the greatest samurai in the Empire. And he was the Shogun's decapitator. He cut off the heads of a hundred and thirty-one Lords. For the Shogun."

By all rights, this should have been a complete and utter disaster. In 1981, Roger Corman's New World Pictures acquired the rights to a Japanese action film called *BABY CART AT THE RIVER STYX*, the second entry in a long-running series about a renegade samurai called Lone Wolf who, along with his young son, travels the roads of 16th-Century Japan, doing battle with an endless stream of ninja warriors sent by the Shogun to eliminate them. Directed by Kenji Mizumi in 1972, *BABY CART AT THE RIVER STYX* was generally considered the best of the seven entries (the last

of which was a made-for-TV film) in the Lone Wolf series, collectively known as *SWORD OF VENGEANCE*. In typical Corman fashion, much of the dialogue was cut from the film, and the story drastically simplified and re-written (changing a tale steeped in Japanese culture into a more simplistic story of revenge), leaving only the bare bones of the plot and the film's frenetic, stylized action scenes. In order to fill gaps, Corman and Company edited in footage from *SWORD OF VENGEANCE*, the first film in the series, detailing the origin of Lone Wolf. The dialogue was then re-dubbed, in a very unusual manner. In an interview with Dan Funaya and Sandra Sepal, David Weisman, producer of the Americas version, described the procedure: "We used only portions of the dialogue to convey the essence of the meaning. We lip-read the characters, and wrote the script to match the movement of the lips as closely as possible". A narrative track was added and a completely new

electronic score, by Mark Lindsey, was substituted for the original Japanese music.

That such major surgery should be performed on a simple action flick did not bode well for the final result; films that endure such radical re-arrangement usually emerge as abditi, incoherent messes with little of the original director's vision left intact, and usually whatever good intentions the American distributors may have had is lost in the mix as well. But what emerged from the fires of re-creation of *BABY CART AT THE RIVER STILE* was something unique and unusual: it was an intensification of director Misumi's vision, a dynamic, mysterious orgy of violence that frames its grim scenario against an almost cartoonishly stylized backdrop, a curious juxtaposition which, somehow, manages to seem perfectly natural. Footage from the two films blends seamlessly, and the eerie, hi-tech score matches the film's patently unreal aura. But most of all, the haunting narration, voiced by Daigoro, the young son of Lone Wolf, who sits in silent witness to the incredible carnage that plays out before him, lends the film a mystic quality that solidifies all the varying elements into a cohesive, unforgettable whole. The end result is nothing short of a masterpiece. The film is **SHOGUN ASSASSIN**.

"It was a bad time for the empire. The Shogun just stayed in his castle, and he never came out. People said that his brain was infected by devils, and that he was rotting with evil. The Shogun said the people were not loyal. He said he had a lot of enemies, but he killed more people than that. It was a bad time. Everybody living in fear."

Released to lukewarm box office but critical lauds (Stalak and Ebert praised it on *SNEAK PREVIEWS*), **SHOGUN ASSASSIN** (so re-named after the success of the *SHOGUN* miniseries on TV) built a minor cult following that grew with its eventual release on MCA Video. While the film hardly qualifies as an underground obsession, ala *PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE* or *SPIDER BABY*, word-of-mouth was generally very good. Ironically, **SHOGUN ASSASSIN** was not the first exposure American audiences had to the

adventures of Lone Wolf and Cub. **LIGHTNING SWORDS OF DEATH**, the third film in the **SWORD OF VENGEANCE** series, had been marginally released to U.S. in the early '70s. Because of this, the film is often confused as being the first in the series (Leonard Maltin's *TV MOVIES* makes this error, claiming that **SHOGUN ASSASSIN** is a sequel to **LIGHTNING SWORDS OF DEATH**, when, in fact, just the opposite is true). Notably less violent and less stylized than its predecessor, **LIGHTNING SWORDS OF DEATH** (also directed by Misumi, who helmed the first four Lone Wolf films) is nevertheless a well-made action film, which features a spectacular, gory climax. It also differs from **SHOGUN ASSASSIN** in that the lead character is not referred to as Lone Wolf, but rather by his real name, Ito Ogami.

'One night the Shogun sent his ninja spies to our house. They were supposed to kill my father, but they didn't. That was the night everything changed, forever. That was when my father left his samurai and became a demon. He became an assassin who walked the road of VENGEANCE. And he took me with him.'

Scripted by Kazuo Kotabe (writer of the Japanese comic book on which this series was based; although Robert Houston, credited director of the American version wrote the superb narration, and helped adapt the re-edited story with producer Weissman, only Kotabe is credited on-screen), **SHOGUN ASSASSIN** begins with a brilliantly-edited sequence, intercut with the opening credits, comprised chiefly of footage from **SWORD OF VENGEANCE**; the empire is in turmoil, and the now-psychotic Shogun's chief samurai, Ito Ogami (Tomisaburo Wakayama) has decided to revolt against the evil sovereign. The Shogun sends a band of ninjas to murder Ogami and his family, but only manage to kill his wife, Ozumi. "They will pay." Ito growls, cradling his wife's dead form in his arms, "with rivers of blood!" It is a threat he makes good on. The Shogun then sends a messenger, telling Ito that he must either renounce his intentions or commit harji-kari. Lone Wolf laughs and replies that he has a third choice—he takes up his sword and slashes his way out of the building in one of the film's most

breathtaking sequences: child in arms, Lone Wolf dispatches guards right and left, while all sound vanishes from the soundtrack, save for the swish of his blade and the gurgle of gushing blood. Outside, the Shogun's guards corner Ito and the old ruler proposes a contest: the Shogun's son, Lord Kurando vs. Lone Wolf in a duel to the decapitation. Ito prevails, as Kurando's headless torso, silhouetted against a magnificent sunset, sinks lifelessly to the ground, blood spouting violently from the stump of his neck. Thus, their fate is sealed: the renegade samurai, Lone Wolf, and his young son, Daigoro (Akifiro Tomikawa), retreat to the open road, never again to lead a peaceful, normal life.

"I don't remember most of this myself. I only remember the Shogun's ninja, hunting us wherever we go. And the bodies falling... And the blood..."

The balance of *SHOGUN ASSASSIN* concerns Lone Wolf and Daigoro's various encounters with death-dealing ninja hit-squads of every nature, and primarily with a bloodthirsty band of female ninjas, who prove their mettle in a grisly, unforgettable scene in which they reduce a potential enemy to his competent part, lopping off

nose, ears, fingers, and legs as he tries to flee from the room, until finally his bloody torso rolls helplessly across the floor, still trying to escape. Lone Wolf and cub meet female ninjas along a lonely road one bright day; disguised as ordinary townfolk, and brandishing lethal vegetables and razor-tipped frisbee hats, the women nevertheless fall like matchsticks before the master's blade, until the Supreme Ninja sets the samurai and attacker with a barrage of somewhat anachronistic gymnastics, but, their initial confrontation ends in a stalemate, with the lady assassin retreating (literally) into the horizon. Later, in a darkly-shadowed wood, an army of soldiers awaits Lone Wolf, who again emerges victorious after a long, violent battle, beautifully rendered through double-exposed imagery and carefully metered action. But the fierce battle has taken its toll: Lone Wolf has been badly wounded, and the pair hole up in an abandoned shack while the child nurses Ito back to health. In these scenes, Mizum's gentle humor comes into play, as Daigoro, unable to keep his palms cupped long enough to bring his father a much-needed drink of water from a nearby brook, fills his mouth with the stuff and then sputters back, dribbling the liquid into his father's mouth.

Later, spotting a potato left as an offering at the foot of a small idol, the boy leaves his jacket in exchange, says a brief prayer, and makes off with



the nourishment. However, the spies, led by the Supreme Ninja, have tracked the renegades, and kidnap the boy, to ransom Ito's life. But the samurai will not submit and, though still weak from his injuries, manages to best the ninja squad once again, rescuing Daigoro, who has been lowered into an abandoned well, in the nick of time. In a rare moment of compassion, Lone Wolf lets the lady ninja live, and escape into the night.

'When we're on a mission, I keep count of how many ninja my father kills. He says not to keep count, only to pray for their souls. But if I don't keep count, I don't know how many souls to pray for. So I keep count. So far it's three hundred and forty-two.'

Meanwhile, Lone Wolf has been hired by townspeople to assassinate a local land baron, who also happens to be the Shogun's brother, who cheats them of taxes and makes their lives miserable. Lone Wolf and Cub board a ship and find that fellow passengers include the Masters of Death, three marauders who serve as bodyguards to the hated land baron Ito has been hired to kill. The Masters of Death are, conceptually and visually, quite obviously the basis for the Three Stooges in John Carpenter's 1985 film *BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA*; their costumes are virtually identical, notably the large woven-straw hats, and though the Masters of Death have no supernatural powers, they do boast some grisly effective paraphanalia with which they perform their duties: one wears a glove equipped with four long iron claws (a sort of medieval Freddy Krueger), another sports a glove studded with spikes, and the last brandishes a deadly spiked club. A brief bit of mayhem ensues, after which the ship goes up in flames and Lone Wolf and the Masters of Death part company; once on shore, Ito and Daigoro find themselves sharing a shack with the Supreme Lady Ninja, who also board the ship in secret. The three draw together (in a bizarre parody of the nuclear family, something that Ito and Daigoro can never truly know again) to ward off the cold.

She again fails to kill Lone Wolf, and the next morning, they leave her behind, knowing she will have to return to the Shogun and commit *seki-kiri* for her failures. The film draws to a thrilling and

gory conclusion as Lone Wolf and Cub face off against the Masters of Death on a bleak desert landscape.

The *SWORD OF VENGEANCE* series is based on a gory Japanese comic book (First Publishing began releasing the comics with American translations in the middle '80s, to great success; Frank Miller provided an intro and did the covers for the first few issues) and nowhere are these origins more evident than in *SHOGUN ASSASSIN*'s outrageously overblown scenes of violence: Ito's thin blade cuts through bone and wood with amazing ease; heads, arms, legs roll; no blood comes from a wound until the blade is removed, and then it gushes out as if pumped by a fire hose. When killed, characters often remain stock-still for several long seconds before finally crumpling to the ground. Such larger-than-life quasi-reality is familiar ground to comic-readers, but seeing it so faithfully rendered on the TV screen is a little unnerving.

This is not to say that the film does not have its whimsical elements, but it is not the spoofy approach that this kind of stylization might suggest; in many ways, *SHOGUN ASSASSIN* is a supremely black comedy, but this aspect is so subtle as to almost be subliminal; Mamiya's casting of this cartoonish violence against an essentially humorless background is at once confronting and exhilarating; it challenges our expectations and toys with our reactions in ways that we do not expect a routine action film to. This is heightened even further by the searing voice-over provided by young Daigoro. Although the actor is not credited in the film, someone wisely cast an actual boy to read the stark narration (as opposed to having an adult actor imitate a child's voice, as in the *TWILIGHT ZONE* episode 'Little Owl Loft') and his halting meter and often clumsy phrasing lends a haunting, textured ambiance that blends perfectly with the already-powerful visuals.

According to *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HORROR FILMS*, the *SWORD OF VENGEANCE* series was devised by producer Shinjiro Katsu as a vehicle for his brother, Tomisaburo Wakayama. As Lone Wolf, Wakayama is brooding and laconic, his expression rarely shifting; he brilliantly conveys the sense of a man who has seen so much carnage that it no longer affects him. He displays emotion rarely, and usually in matters concerning his young son; in a memorable early scene, Ito offers the infant a choice of his own destiny: he places a brightly-colored ball and his

own sword side-by-side on the floor. 'Choose the sword, and you join me,' Lone Wolf says gravely. 'Choose the ball, and you join your mother, in death.' Although the child is too young to truly understand, he crawls to the shiny sword. He embraces the child, and an almost imperceptible smile plays across his lips. 'Your mother would have been proud.' It is one of the central issues of the film that Lone Wolf is never truly alone: he has his son, his one link to the memory of his life before, and in the final analysis, *SHOGUN ASSASSIN* (and indeed the entire *SWORD OF VENGEANCE* series) is primarily the story of the mutual love between father and son.

In *SHOGUN ASSASSIN*, Lone Wolf has been dubbed by film director, Lamont Johnson, who lends the character a nicely world-weary cadence that reinforces Lone Wolf's detachment from society. It is a solid reading, and blends nicely with Wakayama's expressions and body language.

Akira Tomikawa also makes a strong impression as the child; although given virtually no dialogue, his quizzical and often knowing expressions paint a disturbing portrait of shattered youth: this child has never known a life without violence or bloodshed, has never known a life in which he could trust any living soul except for his father. It is easy to imagine this child, as portrayed by Tomikawa, as having provided the narration as it stands, a tribute to Weisman and especially Robert Houston, who wrote the voice-overs for a film that, after all, was not structured for them. 'Some critics say by having Daigoro narrate the story, we compromised the power of his silence,' Houston said in an interview with Furuya and Segal. 'But he's a natural window on the world.' And while a case could be made for Daigoro's unfailing silence--both in thematic and dramatic terms--the fact remains that the child's narration is so supple and evocative that the film would not have the same impact without it.

Among the purely American alterations to the film, special mention must be made of film editor, Lee Percy, who blends disparate footage from the two films into a smooth, seemingly effortless whole. Also of note is Mark Lindsey's fine score, which blends traditional Japanese instrumentation (woodwinds and chimes) with almost Argento-ish electronic themes; they strongly complement the virtuoso visuals. 'We were happy to throw out the music they used,' Houston said. 'The Japanese work in a visual tradition, and their sound technology is not so good. The *SWORD OF VENGEANCE* soundtrack was unsophisticated,

and it was gratifying to us to add a polished sound to go with the visuals. In the original, the music was over-modulated. It sounded like a car radio played too loud.' While it's true that Lindsey's score is a definite improvement, the music in the original Japanese version isn't that bad; however, it would've been difficult to adapt to this re-edited film, and the whole new score gives the film much of its unity. It is a fine piece of work, often very eerie and intriguing.

SHOGUN ASSASSIN was the center of some controversy when first released. Roger Corman had originally received an 'X' rating for the film's extreme violence, so he re-cut a tamer version and submitted it to the MPAA, who promptly gave him his 'R' and sent him along his way. Corman then proceeded to release the original hyper-violent edition to theaters, under the banner of the R, where it played for several months before the MPAA got wind and started to make noises. Fortunately for viewers, the original print was released on the MCA videocassette, with the grisly, unreal mayhem intact. Unfortunately for viewers, the cassette has recently been withdrawn from circulation and *SHOGUN ASSASSIN* remains conspicuously unreleased on laserdisc; let's hope that when it eventually does make it to LD, that MCA will have it letterboxed, since much of the pan-and-scanning is terrible, rendering several shots confusing.

As I drew this to a close, it strikes me that I have left some key points undiscussed: the finely evoked period detail, the often humorous dialogue ('Sometimes you have to take a chance, if you want to take a bath,' and my personal favorite, 'They call me Lone Wolf Assassin with son.'), and the superb use of color. But I think I'll let the viewer discover these, along with the film's other bounties, for themselves; familiarity breeds contempt, and it is ultimately pointless to dissect a film such as this, in which the gentle spider web of suspension of disbelief is so carefully structured. Each separate part is but a contributing factor to the glory of the whole, and the whole of *SHOGUN ASSASSIN* is indeed glorious. The film stands not only as a classic of its genre, but as a stunning, visual masterpiece, a mesmerizing 'opera of violence' (to crib the phrase usually applied to Italian westerns) that assaults the senses and intrigues the mind.

'I guess I wish it was different. But a wish is only a wish.'

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Chinese Ghost Stories:

an interview with

Ching Siu Tung

Conducted by Rainer Czech

Translated by Peter Blumenstock & Markus Nick

RC: Does your new film, *SWORDSMAN 2*, continue the story of the first film?

CST: Yes, it's a direct follow-up to part one. The main characters get into a lot of trouble with some rulers in China. They fight their way through to Japan where they encounter even more adventures.

RC: Why didn't Sam Hui return to the leading role this time?

CST: He wasn't available as he had decided to take a sabbatical from acting. Jet Lee takes over his part. He already worked with Tsui Hark in *ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA*.

RC: Tsui Hark returns as producer of *SWORDSMAN 2*. How much does he exert his influence over you as a producer and how is your relationship with him?

CST: Tsui Hark supports all of the important people during pre-production. He gives his advice but when the filming begins, he doesn't interfere and expects everyone to do

their job. I appreciate him as an absolute professional and as a good friend, from whom I have learned a lot of things. He has given me many opportunities, without being bossy. For me he is like a "sifu" (master).

RC: How did you get into the film business?

ST: My father, Cheng Kang, was a very busy director some years ago at Shaw Brothers. He often took me with him to watch the filming. At that time I was mostly interested in Martial Arts. I was greatly influenced by the things I learned from my father and I owe him a lot for that. He was responsible for my first job as a stuntman. When my father was handed the direction of *THE 14 AMAZONS*, he gave me the job of fighting-instructor. From that time on, I worked on more and more films and my responsibilities became greater.

RC: Do you think other members of your family will enter the film business some day?

CST: Oh, I don't know. My wife Deanne Wong is



not very ambitious in getting a job in the film business. My daughter, Sharon, is only 10 years old and is not yet attracted to cinema.

RC: Was it your aim to become the most important man behind the cameras?

CST: No, I don't think so. I never wanted to be a director - there's a good thing - I never fought for that. Then Golden Harvest offered me the direction of *DUEL TO THE DEATH* and I took the job, just out of curiosity.

RC: Akira Kurosawa uses three cameras for the advantages it gives him in editing his films. What's your procedure?

CST: As a rule I work with two cameras. The cameraman proposes a shot and I decide the angle.

RC: And how do you plan the fight sequences?

CST: I think about it for a few days before I shoot it. On location I look around and see if it's possible to realize my ideas the way I had planned. If not, I have to adjust those ideas to the new reality.

RC: The *A CHINESE GHOST STORY* series have been your biggest box-office successes. What's your opinion of this?

CST: First, I must say that I am very happy about those films being successful. In my opinion, only Chinese people are able to make movies such as *A CHINESE GHOST STORY*. It's mainly a film for Chinese people. In regard to the sequels, there's always pressure to make them if the original makes money. But you have this pressure if you're working on new projects, because you want to be better than before. In this way, I don't consider sequels as sequels, but as new projects on their own. This demands an improvement of my abilities as a film maker.

RC: Do you think we can count on a fourth *CHINESE GHOST STORY*?

CST: As long as the audience wants to see it, there is no reason to not produce a fourth or even fifth part.

RC: In the original *CHINESE GHOST STORY*, there is a sequence with two flying arrows, which looks surprisingly similar to the famous arrow sequence in Kevin Costner's *ROBIN HOOD*.

CST: In the movie business, many people try to copy something from their successful rivals. Here in China for example, the film makers often focus on Stephen Spielberg. In the case of *ROBIN HOOD*, I think the Americans copied from the Chinese since *A CHINESE GHOST STORY* came out five years ago.



Joey Wang

the star of Ching Siu-Tung's highly successful Chinese Ghost Story series

Jacky Cheung



Exposing The Bizarre Truth Behind
HANZO the BLADE

By Bob Sargent

Many times it's the hybrid of a particular genre that makes for the most interesting viewing, and the films of the incredible *SWORD OF JUSTICE* series are no exception. Part gore-film, part samurai sword-slasher, with more or less equal doses of unhealthy-minded sex and misogyny mixed in, they are impossible to accurately categorize. I've watched more than my share of these Asian sword operas, from the bloody *SWORD OF VENGEANCE* to the nihilistic *SON OF THE BLACK MASS*, but I've NEVER seen anything like this before. Information on the short-lived series (reportedly three entries to date) is hard to come by and, to my knowledge, only one reference work (Ric Meyers' wonderfully mind-expanding *Martial Arts Movies*) has even attempted a discussion of any kind. When I finally acquired a copy of Alain Silver's celebrated book, *The Samurai Film* (the updated 1983 version), I was disappointed to discover that the series wasn't even given a passing mention. Seeing as

this is a subject that fits the definition of uncharted territory (as your illustrious editor would say), and so happens to be one that I have a burning desire to learn more about, I'm taking this opportunity to share what little I know with the readers of *ASIAN TRASH CINEMA* in the hope that some knowledgeable scholars of Japanese film will step forward to fill in the holes (regarding cast and credits) that my wife could most likely drive her *Acura* through.

Instituted in 1972 by its (super) star, gruff-faced Shintaro Katsu (real name: Toshio Okumura), the unusually-premised series concerns itself with the exploits of a tough 19th-century Japanese policeman who uses his privates as a torture implement/interrogation device. Yes, you heard right and...no, I am not making this up. The two 'Razor' Hanzo movies that I was able to see (hereafter referred to as *GOTOMI 1* and *GOTOMI 2*) were Japanese language prints with no subtitles. Not being fluent myself, this was less

of a handicap than you would think because after repeated viewings of these, one reaches a level of understanding where it's almost as if you speak the language anyway (and the fact that these are butt-kicking action films doesn't hurt either).

UNHEALTHY MIND, HEALTHY BODY

Like some demented version of '30s pulp-hero Doc Savage, Hanzo puts his scar-encrusted bulk through a daily training regimen that would likely kill, or at least maim for life, most normal men. In his "gymnasium," that looks and functions more like a torture chamber, he has a block with a clearly phallic indentation in it where he, quite unbelievably, pieces his manly-hydraulics and starts pounding away with a small club resembling a miniature baseball bat. Some of this is left to your imagination (extreme close-ups of his penis are shot out-of-focus, and shadows on walls combined with descriptive sound effects are sometimes used to suggest other lurid proceedings), but you get the idea.

Recall when, in some martial arts movies, Shaolin monks would thrust their fists into buckets of hot sand in order to toughen the calluses on their hands? Hanzo applies the same principle to his lower regions with a piece of equipment that looks like something a linebacker would practice slamming into on a football field. Quite unceremoniously, Hanzo jams his sex organs through a hole in the side of an attached basket full of steaming rocks and...well, exercises.

Hanzo also makes a point of testing his torture implements on himself; such as one where the victim kneels on a wooden rack designed to draw blood as stone blocks are placed upon his legs in increasingly heavier numbers. Apparently, Hanzo is an adherent to the old German adage, "that which does not kill me only makes me stronger."

FLOATING INTERROGATION ROOMS AND OTHER INDIGNITIES

To give you an idea of how he goes about performing some of his lawman duties, consider Hanzo's habitual kidnapping of potential female informants, such as the luckless one in *Coyold I*. He conducts her aboard a small, one-chambered boat which his two goofy henchmen then ease out onto the water so that they might have their little "talk," undisturbed. When she doesn't supply the information he wants, she is stripped naked, tied, and then impolitely attacked up her backside by Hanzo in a manner that seems completely routine to him.

Perhaps worse occurs after the villainess of *Coyold II* is abducted and subsequently tortured, for she suffers even further abuse at the hands of Hanzo and his bumbling assistants. Helplessly suspended by a net hung from the ceiling, she is lowered onto the waiting policeman who is impaled on the floor, having already achieved ten-hut status with the hydraulics. Once "impaled," he spins her around like she were a record on a turntable!



He abuses other women in similar fashion, always being sure to treat them to a post-assault soak in his hot tub and a cup of sake for their troubles afterwards. Implausibly, the ladies always fall ass-over-tearful for him immediately following their mistreatment. Rather than arbitrarily inserting such scenes (thus reducing this element to mere window-dressing), these become some of the only keys we have to Hanzo's twisted psyche...the sex IS the story.

Ito Ogami (Sword of Vengeance) had his lost honor and the death of his wife to avenge. Kyoshiro Nemuri (Son of the Black Mass) used his hatred of Christianity and his half-breed status to embroil him in endless conflict. What motivates Hanzo to behave the way that he does is a mystery. The filmmakers don't bother to explain it (via flashback or otherwise) and we don't care. This streamlining helps to keep the series free of some of the "human interest" baggage weighing down the others and enables more screen time to be devoted to the mayhem.

LIGHTNING WATERMELONS OF DEATH

Another Hanzo trait is his frequent use of deception to achieve his ends. In an unforgettable scene from *Coyold II*, Hanzo performs a mock-seppuku (ritual suicide) in the middle of a staff meeting. Having heard enough of his superior's

carping, he cuts open his own belly, reaches in, and throws red handfuls into the face of his shackled supervisor who belatedly realizes (after throwing-up on himself), that the 'entrails' are merely chunks of watermelon that had been secreted under his garment for this purpose.

But Hanzo is at his best when he's smashing his way through some dicey situation like the proverbial bull-in-a-china-shop. The main plot of *Goyoid 2* concentrates on a convent where the 'Mother Superior' (a frightening woman who spends a great deal of screen time in the buff) entertains wealthy clientele by renting out the bodies of innocent young girls in exchange for gold. Ritualistic abortions performed by MS herself, who has the bedside manner of a psychokiller (she caresses her victim's nude body before breaking out the cutlery), have been taking place within the cloistered walls and the corpses resulting from botched jobs have been turning up in town. It doesn't take long for these illicit activities to attract the unwanted attention of Hanzo.

When the final resting place of one of the dead girls is designated to be within the convent grounds, Hanzo makes good use of an opportunity to take the evil wretches by surprise. He assumes her place in the coffin and allows himself to be buried alive! Once inside the enemy conclave, he bursts out of the grave and makes a beeline for the main house where all hell proceeds to break loose!

The visiting aristocrats therein sink to such unheard of levels of cruelty, that the audience is almost completely justified in cheering when Hanzo breaks into their inner-sanctum and kicks their collective asses! Interrupting one depraved bastard's jolly session of nearly flogging a naked girl to death, and then perniciously embracing her to sharp the flesh crimson off her sweat-drenched body (while his drunken buddies watch from peepholes and lazily grope the exposed boobs of naughty nuns standing nearby), our hero demonstrates that he is in no need for such games by snatching the bloodied flog to give the old boy a much-deserved taste of his own medicine! Pursuing the fleeing villains outside, Hanzo briefly engages a masked swordman who, thanks to the memory of an earlier confrontation (and betrayed by a peculiar fighting stance), the policeman is able to identify as a lewdsome bodyguard named Junsai (here, faithfully covering the hasty retreat of his scummy boss). Later, when Hanzo later faces Junsai for the last

time, their fight-to-the-finish culminates in a time-honored tradition where the two close and the fatal blow is struck...off-camera. This is evidenced by the droplets of blood hitting the ground between the two combatants...but who got it? At first, we don't know. Their faces betray nothing. Only when they separate and the loser falls to his knees in astonishment do we get to find out who the fatally wounded one is. How many times have you seen this scenario repeated in spaghetti westerns with guns instead of swords? The use of restraint here, in a film that shows none anywhere else, is curious. Compare this with the literal explosion of gore that ends Akira Kurosawa's *SANJURO* which was made 10 years earlier!

OLD HABITS DIE HARD

After graphically smashing the face of one fugitive (neatly rendered in a spray of blood and other unidentified bodily fluids) with his *sai* (a tapered iron bar with two projecting spines), Hanzo probes the unconscious fellow's broken nose as if he were a craftsman inspecting his handiwork.



In *Goyoid 2*, he examines a dead girl's nipples with the point of his weapon in the same fashion. Hanzo's *sai* is unique in that it has a length of weighted chain that can be drawn from its hiding place in the butt end. He often uses it much like a *Ausari-gama* (a sickle and chain), entangling a fleeing felon's neck or entrapping a plunging dagger with equal ease.

Loud, brutal, and a career misogynist to boot, Hanzo does manage to display some redeeming qualities from time-to-time, such as the one rare instance near the conclusion of *Goyoid 1* in which he assists an impoverished family that is unsuccessfully trying to put a humane end to the life of one of their elderly members who is terminally ill. An almost repentant Hanzo handles

the evil Mother Superior 'between the legs' of one of her girls (Goyoid 2)



the situation with more care and sensitivity than the audience would have thought him capable of (although he does exhibit somewhat of a 'just don't tell anyone I did this for you' attitude) by stringing gramps up from the rafters.

With a minimum of the manners and surface decorum that Japanese society is so obsessed with, Hanzo swaggeres his way across the screen, leaving a trail of intimidated men and sexually assaulted women in his wake.

He openly shows his contempt for his superiors, ignoring the possible consequences of such foolhardy actions. Hanzo hates his immediate supervisor, as made obvious by the frequent heated exchanges between the two, and there is no love lost between them.

One of these altercations, from the first film, culminates in Hanzo donning his favorite spiked brass-knuckles and then demonstrating some brick-splitting for the benefit of his cowardly superior who, after witnessing the adeptness with which he performs the task, has a sudden change of heart and departs with his tail between his legs.

The knucks reappear in Goyoid 2 for an amazing bout of stone statue punching during the opening credits.

LIVING ON THE EDGE

Hanzo is the super-cop of his time so only the most gaudy of assignments come his way. A subplot involving a bandit king results in one of the many dramatic clashes of GOTOID 2. The first time we see this character, he is laughing heartily amid the bloody carnage his men have perpetrated, carving-up helpless peasants and raping their daughters before their unbelieving eyes. Like the Mother Superior, the introduction of this villain makes him appear positively domestic.

A high-profile lawman like Hanzo accumulates a lot of enemies so, quite logically, the living quarters of his home are equipped with a bewildering array of death traps to repel intruders. When a band of ninjas infiltrate the grounds, while Hanzo is quietly soaking in his hot tub, they learn their lesson the hard way. Hanzo pulls one lever and the spears drop from the ceiling to transfix his attackers (who helplessly scream/die in vivid geysers of blood). With the flick of a knife, a hidden ballista of tightly-drawn bows lets fly a barrage of arrows, dropping another group dead in their tracks. A fist to a wall panel reveals a handy cache of weapons that Hanzo plucks down, and he quickly transforms the remaining warm bodies into cold stiffs.

CULTURE SCHLOCK

Amazingly, given the amounts of physical and sexual violence in films such as these, Japan maintains one of the lowest crime rates in the world. Let some know-it-all western psychologist try to figure that one out!

Never before in the history of Japanese cinema has a series so sharply focused on the frustration and the studied animosity that men feel towards women. The Hanzo the Blade films paint a jagged (and contradictory) picture of what the Oriental culture is oftentimes perceived to be. In the USA, many women would be appalled and feminists would most likely call for a public lynching of Katsu and Company if they saw what was being proffered here (especially in light of recent events regarding the issues of sexual harassment). Needless to say, it's not advisable to watch any of these films in mixed company or you're liable to be in for a monumentally uncomfortable evening. Making no excuses for parading as much female flesh and gratuitous violence as the ninety-or-so minute running time of each will allow, they're totally sexist and completely indefensible. In Hanzo's world, women are little more than receptacles. To say that the ladies of the viewing audience might be offended would be an understatement.

Neither pure chambers (Japanese swordplay cinema), nor wholly comparable to the pink cinema (softcore porn industry) of contemporary Japan, the *SWORD OF JUSTICE* series nests somewhere between the two, and it liberally borrows from both.

The filmmakers, fresh from Zato Ichii (a phenomenally successful series of films begun in 1963 about a blind swordsman), knew exactly what they wanted to do with their concept for a new *Edo-gaido* (period/costume film set before 1868') series. The results are remarkably consistent and show no signs of directorial confusion whatsoever. The films have a look to them that reminds me of the work of the great Kenji Mizumi, but I'm guessing it was Katsu himself at the helm (who directed (he also directed *ZATO ICCHI IN DESPERATION* in 1973). Can anybody verify this? Stylistically, these movies share much with the better-known "Baby Cart" films (also Katsu Productions, most of which were directed by Mizumi) in terms of cinematography, special effects, make-up and musical conventions. Much of the imagery defies accurate description and the energetic fight sequences are rousing in the extreme to watch. It should have been a big hit but unfortunately, the box office returns never not have been adequate to finance future installments as the series disappeared almost as quickly as it opened. With Japanese theaters on their last legs in the '90s (thanks to the advent of video), plus that country's current preoccupation with hardcore pornography, a rebirth for Hanzo seems highly unlikely.

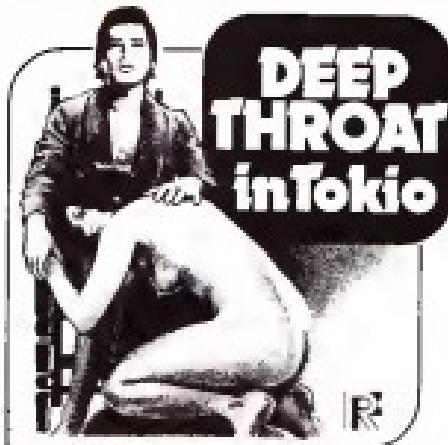
Thanks to Martin David for making it possible for me to actually see these films, and for sharing with me his own valuable insights. Without him, there would have been no article. The films discussed here can be purchased from Samson Video (P. O. Box 372, Suffern, NY 10584, 847-287-5141 for \$20 postpaid).



another victim of Hanzo's interrogations



Deep Throat In Tokyo



DEEP THROAT in Tokio

Directed by Hisashi Makino
Screenplay by Tatsuhiko Kurosu
and Hiroshi Kodaira

Starring Kumi Taguchi, Hideo Murota,
Tatsuya Narjo, Tetsuya Chiba, Akira Momoi
Reviewed by Roc Chen Li

Okay. I'm not saying that this is a great movie. Or anything like that. But, well, goddamn it, this film is so off-the-wall that I just had to write a little bit about it.

Yes, it's really called *Deep Throat In Tokyo*. This is NOT a name change to cash-in-on the more notorious parent. The plot is a serious (perhaps, demented would be a better word) variation on the original premise, produced by the Japanese Toei Company (the same people who gave *Godzilla* to the world).

It's the story of Kumi Taguchi. She's a top model, very refined and very aspiring. Obviously many men are attracted to her and she is the envy of all the other models.

Kumi has a lover. His name is Kenichi Hirota. He is a professional boxer. One day, Kenichi is injured in the ring and he can no longer continue his boxing career. Kumi (who is, after-all a 'savoir faire' woman and thus flighty) leaves him.

Soon Kumi meets Hideo Sukeura, the young heir to the massive Konzern Corporation. She is impressed with his wealth and his life-style. Within a very short time, they marry.

Kumi and Hideo move to the family's estate, an enormous mansion (not unlike the chateau in *The Story Of O*; an obvious and intentional parallel). The house is controlled by the strict sovereignty of Hideo's corporate-boss father, Takehiko. Secretly Takehiko lusts for Kumi.

He arranges for his son, Hideo, to be sent away on an 'extended business trip.' In actuality, Takehiko has ordered the boy's death.

That night, while his son is being murdered, Takehiko drags the girl and he 'takes advantage' of her. But Kumi refuses to 'use her throat' to please him.

This angers Takehiko. He takes Kumi to one of the secret rooms in the house. It is a private operating room, where a team of doctors are standing by. Kumi's clitoris is surgically removed and transplanted to her throat.

Obviously, after the operation, Kumi can only achieve an orgasm through oral sex. She has become a 'lust machine' for Takehiko. He uses her everyday.

But then, one day, Kumi is overwhelmed with a desire to see Hideo again (she doesn't know he is dead). She escapes from the mansion and flees to Tokyo. Sexually frustrated, she takes a job at a geisha house, but the other 'working girls' are jealous of her exuberance and they chase her away.

She retreats to a nightclub where (amazingly) her old boyfriend Kenichi is working as a host/bouncer. They are immediately attracted to each other once again. But their renewed happiness does not last long.

Takehiko's detectives had followed the girl. They kill her boyfriend and take Kumi back to the boss.

Takehiko ties her up and is ready to rape/torture her when he's attacked by his 'dead' son. It seems the death-warrant was never completed; Hideo had bought his way out of it. The boy shoots and kills his father. But then, in a surprise flourish, Kumi snatches the gun and kills Hideo.

The ending is a crime-never-pays-reversal as Kumi becomes the new president of the Konzern corporation.



IN THE NEXT ATC:

an extensive look at the
ultra-violent
Japanese Yakuza films

part 2 of *Urototsukidoji*

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with Chow Yun Fat

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Hong Kong beauty, actress McLaren Lu (more on Page 12).
* Asian Trash Cinema *